



**Aalto University**  
School of Economics

## HOW ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT FACILITATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AND COMMITMENT

A Case Study on Finnish Expatriate Managers in China

Master's Thesis  
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Aalto University School of Business  
Master's Programme in Strategy  
Spring 2018



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**Title of thesis** How Organisational Support Facilitates the Relationship Between Expatriate Adjustment and Commitment: A Case Study on Finnish Expatriate Managers in China

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**Degree programme** Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration

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**Degree programme** Strategy

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**Thesis advisor** Alexei Koveshnikov

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**Year of approval** 2018

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**Number of pages** 126

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**Language** English

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### Abstract

This Master's thesis researches key factors which impact expatriate adjustment in expatriate managers. Furthermore, the research aims to find a linkage between successful adjustment and affective expatriate commitment. Due to the highly globalised business world of today, expatriation has become a norm in the workplace, however companies still struggle with maintaining the commitment of the expatriate managers, leading to loss of significant skill and investment. Thus, the end-target of the research study is to provide recommendations for multinational companies sending expatriates on foreign assignments.

The key objectives of this study are threefold. Firstly, the study aims to examine which factors influence adjustment in expatriate managers. Secondly, it aims to examine the linkage between expatriate adjustment and commitment. Thirdly, the study examines the role of organisational support in facilitating the relationship between expatriate adjustment and commitment.

The research is approached with a qualitative tradition. The data collection is conducted with semi-structured interviews with past expatriate managers. The research study is approached from a case study perspective, focusing on Finnish expatriate managers who have completed assignments in China. Six past expatriate managers were interviewed for the sake of the research. The sample used was relatively homogenous, as all the expatriate managers had somewhat similar demographic backgrounds. All the collected data was transcribed and coded using thematic analysis.

The research study has three main findings. Firstly, it concludes that the expatriate adjustment process is a highly complex one and is impacted by myriad factors. Furthermore, the research observes that adjustment is subjective in nature, therefore effects each expatriate in an individual manner. Secondly, the research study identifies a two-directional connection between expatriate adjustment and commitment and notes that ensuring affective commitment in expatriate managers is a highly beneficial long-term investment. Thirdly, the study observes that multinational companies need to find a balance between organisational support and trust.

The thesis identifies four recommendations for multinational companies: time, trust, train and tailor. Firstly, companies need to give expatriate managers enough time to prepare for their assignments, so they can acquire any needed country-specific skills. Secondly, expatriate managers should be trusted with relatively loose reins in their professional lives, as they will be more likely to have strong workplace morale and strive for high performance. Thirdly, companies should offer expatriate managers both pre-departure and in-country training to enhance their adjustment and satisfaction. The extent and type of training required is determined by the host country in question. Lastly, expatriate training should be tailored to the specific needs of the expatriate manager.

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**Keywords** *expatriation, China, expatriate adjustment, expatriate commitment, affective commitment, organisational support*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Alexei Koveshnikov for all his guidance and endless patience. Special thanks are in order for enduring my more-than-insane working habits and for giving me that last little push that was very much needed. I would also like to thank all my interviewees, who were kind enough to share their insights and interesting stories on the topic.

I would also like to thank my amazing classmates who started this journey with me back in Mikkeli. Thank you to Serina, Saima and Phuong for sticking by me all these years, university would have been a lot duller without you. Many thanks (and apologies) are also in order for Elina and Joni, who have had to endure my many breakdowns. And a special thank you to Daniel, my rock.

Most importantly, thank you to my family for their love and support, and for encouraging me to find my way. This wouldn't have been possible without you.

Sanni Wiksten

20.5.2018

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Background.....	1
1.2. Research Gap and Motivations of Study .....	2
1.3. Research Objectives and Questions.....	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
2.1. Concepts .....	5
2.1.1. Expatriate Manager.....	5
2.1.2. Expatriate Assignment.....	6
2.1.3. Process of Expatriation.....	7
2.2. Expatriate Adjustment and Commitment .....	9
2.2.1. Conceptualisation of Expatriate Adjustment.....	9
2.2.2. Expatriate Adjustment Frameworks .....	13
2.2.3. Factors which Impact Expatriate Adjustment .....	15
2.2.4. Conceptualisation of Expatriate Commitment .....	21
2.3. Cultural Comparison between Finland and China.....	23
2.3.1 Chinese Culture .....	24
2.3.2 Finnish Culture .....	26
2.4. Potential Factors Hindering Adjustment to Chinese Society .....	28
2.4.1. Sociocultural Challenges .....	29
2.4.2. Communicational Barriers.....	30
2.4.3. Challenges with Business Culture .....	32
2.5. Theory Framework .....	34
3. METHODOLOGY .....	39
3.1. Research Design .....	39
3.2. Research Methods .....	40
3.3. Sample Profile .....	41
3.4. Data Collection.....	46
3.5. Data Analysis.....	48
4. FINDINGS .....	53
4.1. Cultural Context .....	53
4.1.1. Sociocultural Differences .....	53
4.1.2. Communicational Differences .....	55
4.1.3. Differences in Business Culture .....	58

4.2. Factors Impacting Adjustment .....	60
4.2.1. General Adjustment.....	60
4.2.2. Work Adjustment .....	67
4.3. Impact of Organisational Support.....	73
4.3.1. Language Training.....	73
4.3.2. Cross-cultural Training.....	75
4.3.3. General Arrangements.....	77
4.3.4. Communication to the Home Company .....	79
4.4. Perception of Commitment.....	82
4.4.1. Link Between Adjustment and Commitment .....	82
4.4.2. Organisational Support and Commitment .....	84
5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS .....	87
5.1. Overall Discussion and Analysis of Findings .....	87
5.1.1. Expatriate Adjustment is a Multifaceted Experience .....	87
5.1.2. Expatriate Commitment is a Long-Term Investment.....	93
5.1.3. Organisations Should Balance Support and Trust.....	95
5.2. Discussion of Framework.....	101
5.3. Recommendations for Multinational Companies .....	102
6. CONCLUSIONS .....	105
6.1. Main Findings .....	105
6.2. Limitations of Research.....	105
6.3. Suggestions for Further Research.....	107
REFERENCES .....	109
APPENDICES.....	115
Appendix 1: Interview Guide .....	115
Appendix 2: Haastattelurunko: Finnish Translation of Interview Guide .....	117
Appendix 3: Example Interview.....	119

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Background of Interviewees.....	45
Table 2: Career Background of Interviewees .....	45
Table 3: Examples from Thematic Coding Process .....	50
Table 4: Examples of Code Relationships.....	51
Table 5: Key Factors Impacting General Adjustment.....	67
Table 6: Key Factors Impacting Work Adjustment .....	72
Table 7: Types of Organisational Support Observed .....	81

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A Conceptual Model of Expatriate Adjustment (Aycan, 1997).....	14
Figure 2: Expatriate Adjustment Framework .....	20
Figure 3: Hofstede's Scale of Chinese Culture (Hofstede, 2016) .....	24

Figure 4: Hofstede’s Scale of Finnish Culture (Hofstede, 2016) ..... 27

Figure 5: Hofstede’s Comparison of Finland and China (Hofstede, 2016)..... 29

Figure 6: Theory Framework..... 35

Figure 7: Snowball Sampling Process Used in Research Study..... 43

Figure 8: Thematic Coding Process Used in Research Study ..... 51

Figure 9: Adjusted Theory Framework ..... 102



# 1. INTRODUCTION

*‘The first year was the toughest. My life revolved around work and trying to get accustomed to the environment. It was mentally exhausting.’*

This quote is a representation of the struggles that expatriate managers face on their expatriate assignments. Being relocated to a completely different environment presents myriad potential issues, such as cultural conflicts, language barriers and challenges integrating to the new work setting. Challenges like these could significantly impact expatriate adjustment to the new surroundings, which could hinder work morale, performance and commitment to the home company. Therefore, it is an essential point of research for multinational companies to understand how they can best support their expatriate managers reach their maximum potential and ensure they remain committed to the home company.

To set the context for the research, section 1.1 will first introduce the background of this study. Section 1.2 will then go on to discuss the research gap and the motivations of the study. Finally, section 1.3 will present the research objectives of this study, followed by the specific research questions that will be focused on.

## 1.1. Background

The past years of business have seen an explosion in global trade and the diminishment of national borders. Globalisation has been a key driver behind pushing companies to actively seek new markets overseas, creating the dynamic and increasingly international workplaces of today. As companies have begun to understand the importance of diverse talent in ensuring the success of their global operations, expatriation has become a norm in the workplace. Global mobility is an explosive trend, with an increasing number of employees being offered expatriate assignments at some point of their careers (eca-international.com). Finaccord (2014) reported that the total amount of expatriates worldwide was around 50.5 million in 2013—growing at a rate of 2.4% between 2009 and 2013, the rate of which is only expected to increase. Individual workers constituted 63% of this figure (ibid).

In the context of this research paper, expatriation is referred to as a type of job transfer that requires the employee to move to another country. More specifically, the type of expatriation studied is assigned expatriation: so expatriate assignments that are assigned by the home company (Jokinen et. al, 2008). Expatriate assignments generally require more commitment from the employee than other international ventures (Mendenhall, n.d.), as they involve a change in home base. This is one reason why handling expatriate assignments efficiently is essential to multinational companies, as moving to unfamiliar surroundings could cause major issues for expatriates. The interest of this research study will be on observing these expatriate experiences in past expatriate managers and analysing aspects that impacted their adjustment and thus, commitment.

This research study will be approached from a case study perspective; therefore, it has particular interest in analysing the experiences of Finnish expatriate managers in China. In recent years, China has become an economic hub and an increasing number of multinationals have become interested in doing business there—to give some background to the specific country context. For this reason, there is a significant amount of expatriate managers located in the region: it was among the top 40 expatriate locations in 2014 (internations.org, 2014). Working and living in China presents many cross-cultural, communicational and practical obstacles for Western managers. Some key elements that academics mention are the significant language barriers, Confucianist religion and way of life and the collectivist culture which has a significant impact on both working life and private life (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen and Sheer, 2003). Furthermore, an interesting point from Kaye and Taylor (1997) is that the larger the cultural difference between the host and home country, the more difficult it is for expatriates to adapt. Therefore, observing the phenomenon of expatriate adjustment in this specific context will be interesting.

## 1.2. Research Gap and Motivations of Study

Expatriates can bring significant reward for multinational companies in the form of strong international competence, market and country-specific insight and a global mindset. Expatriates acquire a substantial amount of specific knowledge capital and thus, high performing expatriates are significant assets to the company. However, they also come with a hefty price tag. Academics describe expatriation as a substantial investment for multinational companies both in terms of tangible and intangible resources (McNulty &

Tharenou, 2004). As expatriation is a costly process, it is crucial for multinational companies to ensure that their expatriates have the tools required to perform to their best potential, so that the invested capital and other resources are not wasted.

Despite expatriation being a usual phenomenon in the workplace, the unfortunate takeaway from current literature is that a significant portion of expatriate assignments carry some element of failure (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004; Degen & Lund, 2010; Dumetz et. al, 2010). Several academics regard the definition of expatriate failure to be premature return of the expatriate to the home country, which seems to be the more traditional approach to the phenomenon (Fukuda & Chu, 1994; Lee, 2007). However, this definition is somewhat limited, as it assumes that those expatriate assignments which do not end prematurely are not failures, when this may not always be the case. Consequently, some researchers have argued that this creates misleadingly low statistics on the failure rates of expatriate assignments (Christensen & Harzing, 2004). Another view taken by academics is that expatriate failure would be defined by expatriate assignments not being completed adequately (Josien, 2012).

In the context of commitment to the home company, failure could therefore manifest as the poor performance of expatriates on assignment or premature departure from host country. For this reason, it is essential to research how companies can ensure the commitment of their expatriates and be able to reap the full potential from the expatriate assignments, no longer losing valuable talent to premature departure—which is an unfortunately common dilemma (Dumetz et. al, 2010).

Expatriate adjustment is a concept that is a little more recent than expatriate failure. Many scholars define it to mean the level of comfort that an expatriate manager feels on their expatriate assignment (Al-Waqfi, 2012; Caligiuri et. al, 2001). Essentially, this concept refers to how well-adjusted expatriates are to their new surroundings. Many academics who have written about expatriate adjustment believe it to be a more effective way to measure the success of expatriate assignments than expatriate failure (Christensen and Harzing, 2004; Al-Waqfi, 2012). As several academics are strongly of the opinion that adjustment is correlated to the success of expatriate assignments—in fact, many refer to it as the cornerstone of efficient expatriation (Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Al-Waqfi, 2012), it is important to understand how this connects to expatriate commitment. Though

there is an abundance of literature available discussing the topic of expatriation, there is a lack of research specifically linking expatriate commitment and adjustment. Therefore, bridging the gap is a crucial point of research. This research paper aims to do just that by building a generic framework that links affective expatriate commitment to expatriate adjustment.

Moreover, there is a limited amount of research which discusses Finnish expatriate managers in China. As mentioned, an increasing number of multinationals have become interested in international trade in China, which is why it would be beneficial to have more in-depth research into this geographic area from a Finnish perspective. As Finland and China are culturally distant (Hofstede, 2016)—in some cases even opposites—sending Finnish expatriate managers there presents many potential problem areas. Consequently, companies need to focus more efforts on ensuring their expatriate assignments run smoothly, to guarantee expatriate adjustment and commitment to the home company. Therefore, a further contribution of this research is to test the developed framework in a China-specific context.

### 1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

In order to fill the research gap and fully comprehend the described problem, this research study will focus on understanding the relationship between expatriate adjustment and commitment. Therefore, the key objective of the research is to formulate an understanding of the complex factors impacting expatriate adjustment and how this is connected to expatriate commitment to the home company. A further target is to pinpoint the role of organisational support in facilitating successful expatriate adjustment and thus, commitment.

According to these objectives, the research study will focus on answering the following questions:

- What are the key factors that influence expatriate adjustment in expatriate managers?
- How is expatriate adjustment linked to affective commitment to the home company?
- How does organisational support facilitate the relationship between expatriate adjustment and affective commitment?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to fully understand the topic of expatriation, it is essential to conduct a thorough and critical analysis of current literature on the topic. Firstly, to gain a well-rounded understanding of this specific topic, the literature review will focus on defining key concepts in relation to expatriation. Furthermore, to take into account the specific cultural context, the literature review will go on to analyse essential elements of Chinese culture that may have an impact on expatriate managers and form an understanding of how these factors effect expatriate adjustment.

The literature review is divided into relevant sub-sections. Section 2.1 will focus on defining the key concepts that will be utilised in this research paper: expatriate managers, expatriate assignments and the expatriation process. Section 2.2 will then go on to explore expatriate adjustment and expatriate commitment in detail and form a framework of the factors which influence expatriate adjustment. Section 2.3 will discuss and analyse the key elements of Chinese culture which may hinder expatriate adjustment, both in the work context and in daily life. Section 2.4 will conclude the literature review and highlight key points that arise from the literature and introduce the theory framework which connects expatriate adjustment to expatriate commitment.

### 2.1. Concepts

Expatriate literature has several key concepts, which need to be defined in the context of this research study. The following sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.3 will cover the concepts of an expatriate manager, expatriate assignment and expatriate process, respectively, and identify how they will be used in this research.

#### 2.1.1. Expatriate Manager

Due to the increasingly competitive global industry, expatriation has become an increasingly common phenomenon in the business world of today (Harrison et al., 2004; Liu & Ipe, 2010). Therefore, it is an aspect many employees face during their professional lives. Expatriate managers play a key role in aiding organisations to succeed in their global ventures, as

academics strongly agree that expatriate assignments are valuable for multinational companies (ibid; McNulty & Tharenou, 2004). Expatriate managers are defined as employees who are transferred to another country on a foreign assignment (Jokinen et al., 2008). The key role of expatriates is to ensure that the home company's knowledge, business culture and global strategies are transferred successfully into the host country (Liu & Ipe, 2010).

The specific area of expatriation studied in this research study is assigned expatriation, which refers to expatriate assignments which have been issued by the home company (Jokinen et al., 2008). This means that the companies have themselves assigned these international careers for their employees. Therefore, in the context of this research, expatriate managers refer to corporate expatriates—self-initiated expatriates are not relevant for this research.

#### 2.1.2. Expatriate Assignment

An expatriate assignment refers to a job transfer that will require the employee in question to move to a new country. It differs from other international assignments in the sense that it requires a higher level of commitment, as the employee's home base will be the host country. Also, they are generally lengthier than other types of foreign assignments (Mendenhall, n.d.). Many academics argue that the value these assignments bring in the form of experienced global managers and significant knowledge of certain regions is substantial (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004), which is why an increasing amount of companies are choosing to send employees on expatriate assignments.

As mentioned earlier, this research will focus specifically on corporate expatriation. When referring to expatriate assignments, this research will focus solely on assignments that have lasted for a year or longer. The reasoning for this is that in order to analyse expatriate adjustment effectively, long-term assignments need to be observed. Several academics agree that culture shock is a phenomenon that is observed mostly in the early stages of foreign assignments, whereas adjustment to new surroundings does not become apparent until some time is spent in the new country (Lysgaard, 1955; McNulty and Tharenou, 2004). Moreover, short-term expatriates may perceive their expatriate assignment as more of an extended business trip, therefore making adjustment to the new culture redundant. To continue, Harrison et al. (2004) claim that the length of the expatriate assignment is linked to the level

of commitment of an expatriate manager. Therefore, by observing expatriate assignments of a year or longer, expatriate commitment is likely to be more evident (ibid).

### 2.1.3. Process of Expatriation

Expatriation itself is a complex process, and one that researchers tend to divide into several sections. Generally, literature divides this into three groups: pre-departure processes, processes during the expatriate assignment and processes involved with the repatriation of expatriates. The key areas which should be identified are selection, training and preparation, adjustment, monitoring and performance management, and repatriation (Vojinić et al., n.d.). The process of expatriate adjustment will be discussed in more detail in section 2.2, whereas the other areas will be clarified in the following section.

Firstly, current literature emphasises the importance of expatriate selection as a foundation of successful assignments. As expatriates come with a heavy price-tag, selecting the right person for the job is a crucial step of the process (Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Croker & Lee, 2006; Degen & Lund, 2010). Characteristics that companies should consider are generally divided into professional qualities, global qualities, and country-specific qualities (Degen & Lund, 2010). Solid professional performance is a vital characteristic to consider, with emphasis on attributes like managerial experience, flexibility, and problem-solving skills: all key assets on expatriate assignments (ibid; Josien, 2012). Moreover, evaluating global qualities such as past international experience is of equal importance, as this can have a significant impact on adjustment to a new culture and setting—past international experience tends to alleviate the risk of culture-shock (Wang & Kanungo, 2004). To continue, country-specific qualities should also be considered during the selection stage, especially to countries that are culturally distant. This could include certain language skills, experience with the culture or certain personality traits, to mention a few (Degen & Lund, 2010).

Secondly, adequate training and preparation for the expatriate assignment is a crucial step of the process. Literature on the topic of expatriation widely agrees that training is a key tool to improve expatriate adjustment (Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Croker & Lee, 2006; Degen & Lund, 2010). Expatriate training generally includes some form of cross-cultural training from the company, which assists the expatriate in integrating to the new society and operating successfully in the unfamiliar setting (Brislin, 1994; Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Croker

& Lee, 2006). It aims to give the expatriate tools to adjust successfully into the new culture and could include aspects like language lessons and cultural awareness training (ibid). The most common form of expatriate training is pre-departure training and many researchers also believe this to be the most effective (Degen & Lund, 2010; Selmer, 2010). However, in-country training is also rising in popularity, as it allows expatriates to combine theory with practise, and reduces the risk of feeling abandoned by the home-company (ibid). Preparation for expatriate assignments also entails other aspects than training, as there are practical arrangements that need to be taken care of prior to departure. These include aspects like flights, housing, visas, work permits and schools to mention a few, and are generally handled by the home company.

Thirdly, monitoring and performance management are important parts of the expatriation process, as they help companies ensure that their expatriates are performing to a high-level and are satisfied both career-wise and in their everyday lives (Tahvanainen, 2000). This not only includes typical managerial measurement tools, such as performance appraisals and specific target setting, but also measures to ensure that expatriates feel supported and content. Tahvanainen (2000) also emphasises the importance of tailoring performance management tools to fit the specific needs of the expatriate, as expatriate assignments vary significantly in terms of length and complexity. Company support throughout the expatriate assignment has been linked directly to enhancing adjustment and overall satisfaction (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001), so is an important factor of the expatriate process. Moreover, it is a key instrument in effectively controlling knowledge management and transfer in companies: successful communication between the home company and the expatriate allows the company to leverage the very specific knowledge and insight that has been gained (Tahvanainen, 2000; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Effective communication to the home company can also help alleviate any sense of abandonment and strengthen the expatriate's commitment towards the home company by building a strong psychological contract (ibid).

Lastly, a commonly neglected aspect of the expatriation process is repatriation, which involves how companies handle the return of their expatriate managers. As expatriation is a significant investment for companies, it is crucial to ensure that this acquired talent is not lost to competitors (Degen & Lund, 2010). Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) discuss the importance of the psychological contract that forms between the expatriate and the home company, as the stronger this is, the less likely it is for an expatriate to leave the company



post-assignment. The researchers go on to emphasise important repatriation tools that companies should implement, to ensure the smoothness of the repatriation process (ibid). Some tools mentioned are ensuring future career development with written agreements and sending expatriates on shorter assignments (ibid). An interesting point brought up by Paik et al. (2002) is how companies should not only address the expatriates' career needs upon repatriation, but also help them re-integrate into the society. Several researchers have mentioned the commonness of reverse culture-shock in expatriates (ibid; Hurn, 1999; Furnham, 2012), therefore it is clearly an issue that multinationals need to address during the repatriation stage.

## 2.2. Expatriate Adjustment and Commitment

Due to globalisation and the explosive growth in international ventures, the topic of expatriation has become an increasingly researched phenomenon in literature. Academics widely acknowledge that handling expatriate assignments efficiently is beneficial for organisations, as it maximises the potential satisfaction of their expatriates, and thus, is likely to impact the overall success of their foreign assignments (Harrison et al., 2004; McNulty & Tharenou, 2004; Liu & Ipe, 2010). As effective expatriate adjustment and expatriate commitment are important factors in successful expatriation, it is essential to research how these concepts are connected.

The following sections discuss the concepts of expatriate adjustment and commitment in the context of this research paper. Section 2.1.1 begins by conceptualising the topic of expatriate adjustment. Section 2.2.2 continues by exploring different expatriate adjustment frameworks that have been utilised in expatriate literature. Section 2.2.3 then moves on to identify the different factors which impact expatriate adjustment and develops a framework to explain these. Lastly, section 2.2.4 introduces the topic of expatriate commitment, and conceptualises it in the context of this research.

### 2.2.1. Conceptualisation of Expatriate Adjustment

Expatriate adjustment is a topic commonly discussed in literature regarding expatriation and is regarded as an effective tool for measuring the success of expatriate assignments. Expatriate adjustment, as the name suggests, refers to the level of adjustment and comfort

that expatriate managers feel in their host countries and new surroundings (Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri et. al, 2001). Torbiorn (1982) extends this definition, by stating that successful expatriate adjustment is a ‘balanced psychological state’, which allows the expatriate to function effectively as a member of the foreign society.

To continue, adjustment to foreign assignments is perceived as a multidimensional phenomenon, and has several layers: psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment, and work adjustment (Aycan, 1997). Therefore, the concept of expatriate adjustment is a complex one. Past literature has also made the connection between efficient expatriate adjustment and work performance: adjusting well to the host country translates to decreased stress and overall higher levels of job satisfaction (Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri et. al, 2001).

Many academics believe that the level of expatriate adjustment has a positive correlation with the overall job performance of expatriate managers, which is why it a crucial point of research (Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Al-Waqfi, 2012). Aycan (1997) claims that successful adjustment is a key tool to both minimise conflict and stress in expatriates and boost their effectiveness. Andreason (2003) makes a supporting argument, and states that ineffective expatriate performance is overwhelmingly caused by the inability to adjust to the foreign surroundings and environment, rather than issues like professional inadequacy. He goes on to say that poor adjustment is also strongly related to the premature returns of expatriate managers. Overall, literature on the topic of adjustment is in consensus with this claim, and many academics agree that the more adjusted an expatriate manager is to their surroundings, the less likely they are to end their assignment and return prematurely (Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Andreason, 2003).

Regarding the conceptualisation of expatriate adjustment, many academics have divided the concept of expatriate adjustment into categories, as it is perceived as a multidimensional phenomenon (Black, 1988; Aycan, 1997; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2012). While literature on the topic of expatriate adjustment commonly circulates around work adjustment, academics have highlighted the need to also consider factors outside work-life (Black, 1988; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2012). Adjustment to daily life and the host culture are a significant part of expatriate adjustment, which is why they should be considered as an additional dimension separate from work adjustment (ibid).

One common conception adopted by expatriate literature is to view adjustment from two perspectives: general adjustment and professional adjustment (Black, 1988). The first observes the adjustment of the employee into the host culture and society, whereas the latter is more focused on adjustment to business culture and the new job requirements (Black, 1988; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2012). As these areas of adjustment have different underlying causes, it is essential to analyse both perspectives to gain an overall understanding of what enhances expatriate adjustment. This also highlights the perspective that expatriate adjustment is a complex phenomenon, as can be gathered from existing literature.

An alternative perspective discussed by academics is to divide the concept of expatriate adjustment further. Black and Stephens (1989) first introduced this idea in their work, and it has become accepted as the norm in by several academics (Lee, n.d.; Black et al., 1991; Ayca, 1997; Zhou, 2009). The authors introduce three key dimensions in which expatriate adjustment could be categorised. The first dimension is adjustment to work, which entails adjusting to the new job position. Essentially, this means adjusting to the professional requirements, expectations and changes that come with the expatriate position. This is one of the key factors also discussed by other academics in the context of expatriate adjustment (ibid). The second dimension refers to expatriate adjustment to the general environment, which includes factors of daily life that may impact adjustment: local culture, housing and practicalities of living in a foreign country for instance (Black & Stephens, 1989; Ayca, 1997). The third dimension that Black and Stephens (1989) introduce is one that was often overlooked by other academics: the adjustment towards interacting with locals, or interaction adjustment. This dimension is linked to mainly contact with host nationals, both in terms of communication and socialisation (ibid).

To continue, several other academics have begun discussing the role of social interactions and its effect on expatriate adjustment (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007). Research has shown that there is noteworthy correlation between the level of contact with host country nationals and expatriate adjustment (ibid). For instance, Liu & Shaffer (2004) makes the point that having a supporting network of host local contacts can ease the adjustment of expatriates into foreign surroundings, as this gives access to local insight and thus lowers uncertainty. Moreover, interaction with host country nationals is what truly

allows expatriate managers to integrate and adapt into the foreign society (ibid; Seibert et al., 2001).

Furthermore, Liu & Shaffer (2004) and Mäkelä (2007) make the connection between social capital and expatriate adjustment. Social capital refers to the capital that exists among individuals' relationships, thus is an important measure of the personal relationships and networks of an individual (ibid; Karner, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001). Social capital is created and facilitated through effective social interactions and exchanges, therefore in the expatriate context could facilitate in-depth relationships and build trust with locals. Moreover, it is likely to aid in building a more pronounced intercultural awareness and understanding of host nationals (ibid). Therefore, creating social capital through effective interactive adjustment can have a positive impact on the level of adjustment of an expatriate manager, which would likely improve their performance. On the other hand, this dimension would likely have a significant amount of overlap with the other two dimensions, therefore its stand-alone value is slightly questionable. As an example, in Aycan's (1997) adjustment model, the interaction dimension is incorporated under general adjustment. For this reason, in the context of this research study, the following two categories of expatriate adjustment will be focused on: work adjustment and general adjustment.

To conclude, as current literature on the topic of expatriation highlights, expatriate adjustment is a highly multidimensional and complex process (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989; Aycan, 1997; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2012). As Caligiuri et. al, (2001) state, expatriate adjustment is a relatively personal phenomenon, therefore affects each individual differently. For the sake of this research paper, expatriate adjustment will be characterised as the degree of comfort that an expatriate feels towards their new environment, especially in the direction of reduced stress and higher satisfaction (Aycan, 1997). Expatriate adjustment can be conceptualised as having two distinct dimensions: work adjustment and general adjustment (Black, 1988). These dimensions should both be taken into account separately when studying the topic of adjustment and its' effect on expatriate performance and commitment. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to observe whether there is any observable spillover effect between the two dimensions.

### 2.2.2. Expatriate Adjustment Frameworks

Expatriate adjustment has become an increasingly researched phenomenon, as academics begin to have a better understanding of the impact it has on expatriate performance (Lysgaard, 1955; Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri et. al, 2001). Therefore, literature on the topic of expatriation has introduced several different frameworks to identify and analyse how adjustment to new surroundings occurs in different individuals.

To begin with, a common framework utilised in expatriation studies is the U-curve theory of cross-cultural adjustment developed by Lysgaard (1955). The framework is a representation of the common pattern that adjustment to new cultures takes. The initial 'honeymoon' period highlights a time where the individual is excited and happy to explore the new surroundings. The 'culture shock' period that follows is a time of frustration with the challenges that daily life in the new surroundings brings. The 'adaptation' period is when the individual starts gradually adapting to the new surroundings, and the 'mastery' period is the improvement of individual behaviour and performance in the new surroundings (Lysgaard, 1955; Black & Mendenhall, 1991). Though this theory of cross-cultural adaptation is somewhat dated and the speed of adaptation is typically unique to each individual (Caligiuri et. al, 2001), it still provides a relatively useful framework to map the general progression of adjustment in individuals. To continue, it supports the decision of selecting expatriates that have been on assignments of a year or longer, as otherwise expatriate adjustment could not be effectively observed. However, it cannot be utilised much to analyse the connection between adjustment and the specific factors that impact it.

Moreover, another theory to explain the development of expatriate adjustment is the theory of met expectations introduced by Caligiuri et. al (2001). This theory asserts that the level of adjustment of an expatriate is tied to their expectations prior to the assignment. Essentially, the closer the expectations of the expatriate to the realised experience, the easier their adjustment process will be (ibid). Therefore, by ensuring that expatriate managers have realistic expectations of their foreign assignments, companies can ease the adjustment process and potentially improve performance and effectiveness (Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Al-Waqfi, 2012). This is an effective theory in gaining an understanding of factors that impact expatriate adjustment but does little to explain on the actual process of adjustment and its' outcomes.

To continue, Aycan (1997) builds on the three dimensions conceptualised by Black and Stephens (1989) and develops a model that illustrates the process of expatriate adjustment and its' outcomes. The basis for her model is to perceive expatriate adjustment as a multifaceted phenomenon, which is influenced by several factors (ibid). The model is illustrated further in Figure 1.

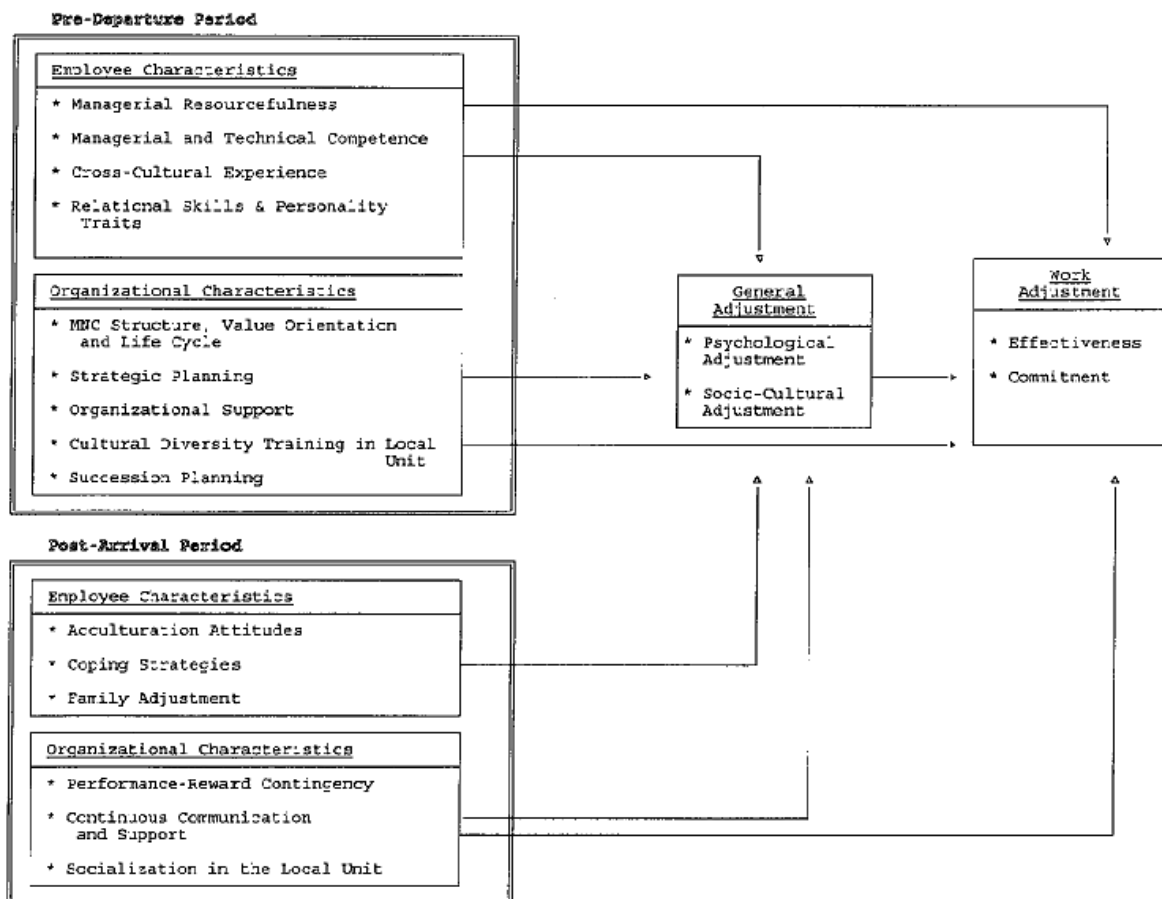


Figure 1: A Conceptual Model of Expatriate Adjustment (Aycan, 1997)

As Figure 1 illustrates, Aycan (1997) has split the concept of adjustment into two categories: organisational characteristics and employee characteristics. The former focuses on aspects which are linked to the expatriate themselves, for instance personality, professional aptitude and spousal support. The latter factor focuses on aspects linked to the home company, such as organisational support and expatriate training. The key function of Aycan's (1997) model is to view expatriate adjustment from both perspectives, as effective adjustment is the function of both personal competencies and company support.

Moreover, Aycan's framework integrates all the three dimensions introduced by Black and Stephens (1989) and utilises them to explore the factors effecting expatriate adjustment. Her model identifies two key areas of adjustment: work adjustment and general adjustment, where the latter combines both interactive adjustment and general adjustment (Aycan, 1997). In the model, these are referred to as sociocultural adjustment and psychological adjustment, respectively. Sociocultural adjustment refers to the expatriate's ability to become a functioning and effective part of the foreign society (ibid; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007). This also includes building social capital through interaction adjustment, which is highlighted by several academics (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007). Psychological adjustment refers to the mental well-being of the expatriate, and the general feeling of comfort they feel towards their surroundings (Aycan, 1997). Work adjustment refers to the level of adjustment towards all work-related issues, such as new tasks and professional challenges—this includes both performance and attitude (ibid; Black, 1988).

On the other hand, Aycan (1997) combines commitment and adjustment together, and her model indicates that commitment is a direct factor under work adjustment. This is slightly contradicting to what other literature in the field has written, as many researchers discuss commitment as a separate concept to adjustment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Meyer and Allen (1991) argue that commitment is a psychological construct, whereas current literature refers to adjustment as a state-of-being (Torbiorn, 1982; Caligiuri et. al, 2001). This exemplifies how they are different ideas, though closely inter-linked.

Overall, Aycan's (1997) work provides a cohesive and integrative model that combines all relevant theory discussed in expatriate adjustment literature. This provides an efficient basis to begin analysing the specific elements that impact expatriate adjustment and explore how they are inter-connected. Aycan's (1977) model will therefore be utilised further in the context of this research.

### 2.2.3. Factors which Impact Expatriate Adjustment

The topic of expatriate adjustment is widely discussed in expatriate literature, as it is a driving force in determining the success of expatriate assignments and the overall performance of expatriate managers (Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Al-Waqfi, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to pinpoint the specific issues that have a noticeable impact

on the adjustment of expatriates, both in terms of hindering adjustment and enhancing it. The key factors which impact expatriate adjustment are generally divided into three key categories, based on past literature (Black, 1988; Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2010; Degen & Lund, 2010; Josien, 2012) and Aycan's model of adjustment (1997). The first key category is employee characteristics, which includes essential elements from the expatriate selection stage. The second category explores the impact of cross-cultural elements, which includes aspects such as differences in business culture and language barriers. The third category is focused on organisational support, which includes different support mechanisms from the home organisation.

In the context of this research paper, one focus is on understanding the role of organisational support in the specific cultural context. Therefore, the two categories of factors effecting adjustment that will be focused on are cross-cultural elements and organisational support. As several academics point out, the influence of organisational support on expatriate adjustment cannot be over-stated, as it has a clear link with smooth adjustment and successful assignments (Aycan, 1977; Selmer, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Croker & Lee, 2006; Degen & Lund, 2010). As organisational support has been found to be tightly linked with alleviating potential issues arising from the new cultural surroundings (Aycan, 1977), it is an essential factor to research in the context of expatriation, and therefore the appropriate choice for this research. As employee characteristics have more impact on the selection stage of the expatriation process and are challenging to measure reliably, they will not be discussed further in this context.

### *Cross-cultural Elements*

Most literature on the topic of expatriate adjustment discusses the role of culture in expatriate assignments, as cross-cultural elements and culture shock have a clear impact on the process of expatriate adjustment. As Oberg (1954: 1) summarises, 'Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life.' This highlights why cross-cultural differences can play a key role in expatriate adjustment.



When discussing expatriate assignments and adjustment, cultural aspects are often divided into sub-categories. A common view adopted by several academics is to divide cross-cultural elements into sociocultural aspects, communicational aspects and business culture (Black, 1988; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2012). Sociocultural elements focus on cultural aspects linked to the new host culture and society, communicational aspects refer to issues linked to language and discourse, and business culture is centred around the professional culture in the host country.

Sociocultural aspects include factors linked to the host country's cultural values, beliefs, religion and history (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Several academics identify cross-cultural shock as one of the key attributes impacting expatriate adjustment (ibid). The level of comfort that an expatriate feels during their expatriate adjustment is closely tied with how culturally distant the host country is. Kaye and Taylor (1997) state that the more significant the cultural distance between the host country and country of origin, the more problems expatriates face with adjustment. This is a view shared by many other academics (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Black et. al, 1991), and is referred to as the effect of cultural distance in literature, or 'cultural toughness'. Therefore, sociocultural elements have a key impact on expatriate adjustment, and should be anticipated beforehand. The importance of this is highlighted in cases of significant cultural distance between host and home country (ibid).

Moreover, communicational factors can also have a significant impact on expatriate adjustment. One of the most prominent factors which could hinder communication and cause potential culture shock is the language spoken in the host country: obviously in cases where a language barrier exists. Selmer and Luring (2015) argue that the level to which expatriates understand and speak the host country language has a direct impact on adjustment, as language is a key instrument which enhances integration to the foreign society. Significant language barriers can cause conflict, misinterpretations and a feeling of exclusion in daily life. The extent of the language barrier is influenced heavily by aspects like the language difficulty and ambiguity, as some languages have nuances and hidden meanings that can be challenging for foreigners to interpret (ibid).

Furthermore, as Kaye and Taylor (1997) highlight, another key aspect of communication is not specifically related to the host country language, but the methods and styles of

communication. Varying levels of directness, for example, could cause huge clashes in communication (ibid), as could communication between high and low-context cultures (Hall, 1976), which have highly different approaches to language implicitness and directness. Also, it needs to be addressed that language does not just refer to spoken or written language, but also non-verbal means of communication. Subtleties of language such as hand gestures, eye contact and level of physical contact can vary hugely by culture, and cause room for misinterpretation and miscommunication (Selmer and Lauring, 2015).

To continue, the specific business culture of the host country also plays a role in the speed of expatriate adjustment. It is essential to understand that elements of the host culture also impact the local business culture (Chen & Sheer, 2003; Degen & Lund, 2010; Jiang, 2013), though these do not always go hand in hand. Business culture impacts factors such as management styles, decision-making processes, level of formality, hierarchy and overall communication (ibid). Generally, the more significant the cultural distance between home and host country, the more difficulties the expatriate manager will have adjusting to the new professional environment (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). Furthermore, as expatriate assignments are work-related assignments, elements of work life will play an important role in the level of comfort of the expatriate, as a majority of their time will be spent at work. Therefore, business culture plays a key role in impacting overall expatriate adjustment.

### *Organisational Support*

A further key issue which impacts expatriate adjustment significantly is the level of organisational support from their home company. Expatriate assignments can be highly stressful in terms of work-load, cultural conflicts and being based in foreign surroundings. Therefore, the level of organisational support that expatriates receive can impact adjustment significantly. Aycan (1997) states that the more assistance and support an expatriate receives from their home company, the less stress they feel during the assignment, which can potentially mean easier adjustment and higher levels of performance. Moreover, successful organisational support can enhance employee commitment to the home company, thus ensuring that organisational resources are not lost (ibid).

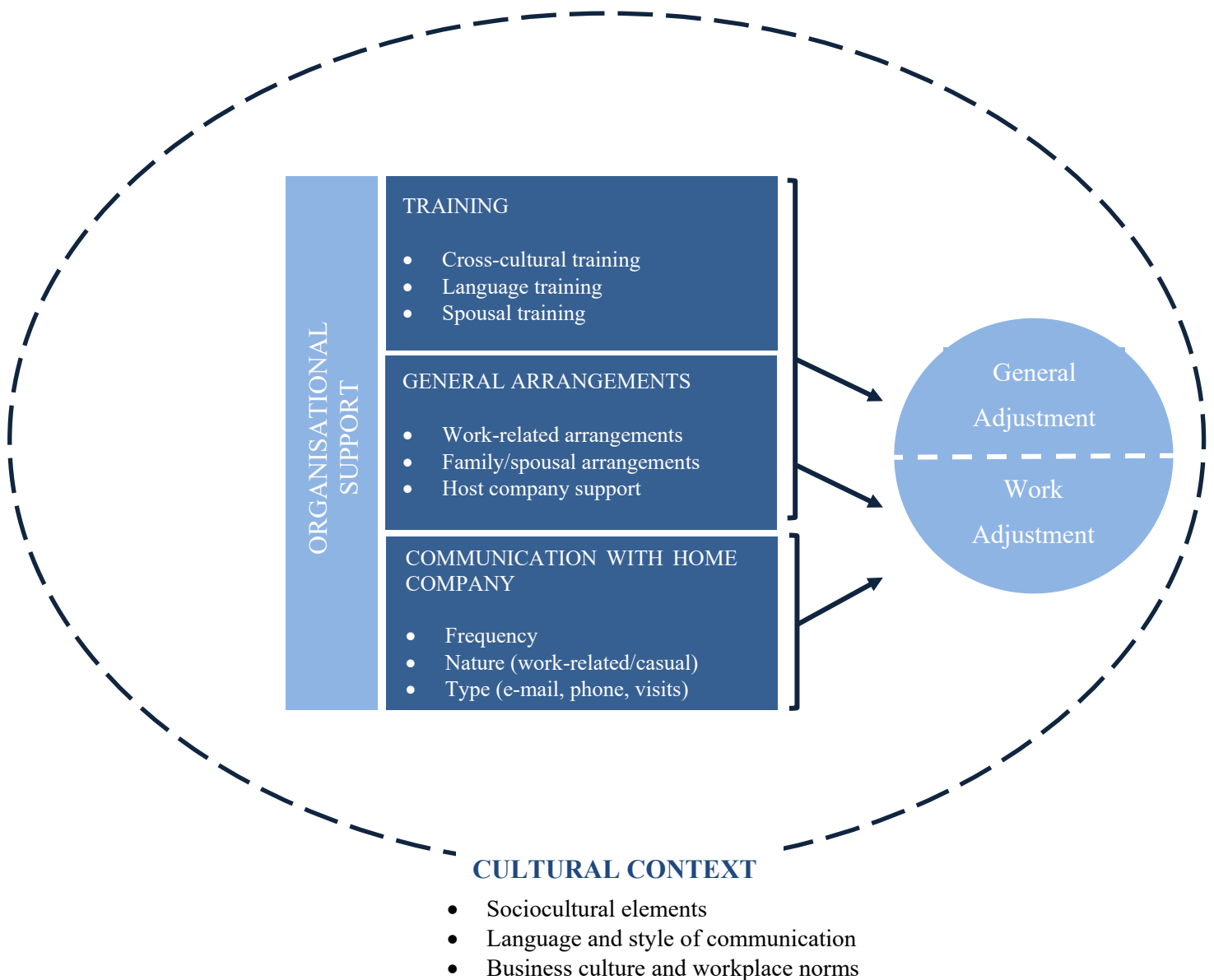
One key element of organisational support that academics discuss frequently is cross-cultural training: it is crucial for companies to train and prepare their expatriates adequately. Literature on the topic of expatriation highlights expatriate training as a key tool in enhancing the success of expatriate assignments (Selmer, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Croker & Lee, 2006; Degen & Lund, 2010). The key role of expatriate training is to prepare expatriate managers to the foreign surroundings, in order to alleviate culture-shock and ensure their expectations are realistic (ibid). As Caligiuri et al.'s (2001) theory of met expectations states, having accurate expectations is a key factor in ensuring successful expatriate adjustment. Moreover, expatriate training aims to give expatriate managers the tools they need to thrive in a foreign environment and integrate themselves into the foreign society and professional world (ibid). Andreason (2008) defines expatriate cross-cultural training as 'anticipatory adjustment', as it prepares the expatriates adequately towards adjusting to the new surroundings.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, tailoring the expatriate selection criteria towards the specific foreign assignment is essential, in order to ensure that the organisation can match the best possible employee to the task (Aycan, 1997; Degen & Lund, 2010). The aspect of tailoring should also be utilised when designing expatriate training programs (Caligiuri et al, 2001). It is essential that the expatriate training is relevant towards the specific assignment and match the expatriate's needs (ibid). As an example, in cultures where English is not spoken natively, language training may be applicable and even a necessity (ibid; Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Degen & Lund, 2010).

To continue, as Brislin (1994) claims, expatriate training is not the only tool that companies should utilise to ensure the success of their expatriate assignments, but one among many. Expatriate training by itself is not likely to be effective: other measures need to be adopted also (ibid). One tool that Aycan (1997) mentions is for organisations to take care of general living aspects, such as ensuring that housing, taxation and schools are taken care of. As expatriate assignments are highly stressful events, organisations should aim to make the adjustment towards the new life as smooth as possible (ibid).

## *Expatriate Adjustment Framework*

To conclude, expatriate adjustment is a highly multidimensional topic, and is impacted by myriad factors. As mentioned earlier, two major areas which come up frequently in past literature include cross-cultural elements and organisational support (Black, 1988; Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Andreason, 2008; Al-Waqfi, 2010; Degen & Lund, 2010; Josien, 2012). The link between organisational support and expatriate adjustment is further exemplified in a framework in Figure 2. The framework illustrates the relationship between elements of organisational support and expatriate adjustment in the specific cultural context of the host country.



**Figure 2: Expatriate Adjustment Framework**

#### 2.2.4. Conceptualisation of Expatriate Commitment

Literature on the topic of expatriation is strongly of the opinion that expatriate assignments are highly beneficial for organisational success (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004; Liu & Ipe, 2010). However, expatriates are also significant investment for companies, as expatriation includes large non-direct and direct investments (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004). Therefore, as there are myriad cost-effective alternatives to expatriate assignments, such as short-term foreign assignments and business trips, it is essential for companies to ensure that their investment in expatriates pays off (ibid). This is why researching how companies can ensure the commitment of their expatriate managers is crucial, as this is a growing worry for organisations (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Liu & Ipe, 2010). It is important to understand the underlying factors of expatriate commitment, and how this is linked to expatriate adjustment.

Much like expatriate adjustment, expatriate commitment is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, which has acquired many definitions in expatriate literature (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993). Several academics refer to expatriate commitment as a psychological state-of-being, which gives employees the desire and need to remain committed to their organisation (ibid; Liu & Ipe, 2010). A common perspective adopted in past literature on the topic of expatriate commitment is to utilise the three-dimensional model of commitment (ibid). These three dimensions first identified by Meyer and Allen in their work (1991) include normative commitment, behavioural commitment and continuance commitment.

Meyer and Allen (1991) claim that the three components of commitment are closely interlinked. These three approaches all agree that commitment is a psychological construct, which shapes the organisation's relationship with the employee, and shape their interest in continuing to be a part of that organisation (ibid). Affective commitment is the perspective that employees desire to remain loyal to the organisation. Continuance commitment sees commitment from a cost-based view, therefore stating that employees remain loyal to the company as they acknowledge the costs of leaving the company. Lastly, normative commitment takes the view that employees feel obligated to remain committed to the company (ibid).

In the context of this research paper, affective commitment will be focused on. Expatriate commitment in the context of this research paper is directly linked to the expatriate's psychological need to remain loyal towards their home company. Furthermore, this research paper circulates around finding the linkage between expatriate adjustment and commitment. As adjustment can be seen as a psychological state-of-being and thus as a cognitive process (Aycan, 1997; Torbiorn, 1982), it can be argued that it will have a direct impact on attitude and behaviour, and thus commitment. As affective commitment is closely linked to employee behavioural patterns and the psychological contracts between expatriates and their employers (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Liu & Ipe, 2010), the concept of affective commitment is the most appropriate for this research paper.

Meyer and Allen's (1991) model of expatriate commitment focuses on commitment as a factor of employee retention. Many other academics also view commitment from the perspective that higher commitment leads to lower employee turnover (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993; Liu & Ipe, 2010). Aycan (1997) uses the concept of psychological contracts to describe the psychological agreements between the expatriate and employer, a similar concept to expatriate commitment, and states that any violation of this psychological contract would lead to higher employee dissatisfaction. Moreover, she continues to claim that this has a distinct correlation with employee retention (*ibid*).

In the context of this research paper, expatriate commitment during the foreign assignment is the focus of research. Therefore, employee retention in this case would refer to avoiding the premature return of expatriates. Expatriate commitment is an essential factor that multinational companies need to take into account, as losing trained expatriates due to premature repatriation is a major loss of investment: loss of invested capital, human resources and knowledge capital (McNulty & Tharenou, 2004; Degen & Lund, 2010; Dumetz et. al, 2010).

On the other hand, Liu & Ipe (2010) among others (Meyer et al., 1993; Caligiuri, 1997) also discuss expatriate commitment as one determiner of expatriate performance during their foreign assignments. Caligiuri (1997) also expresses similar views, by pointing out that as foreign assignments are highly stressful and demanding for expatriates, they need to be highly committed to the organisation to participate. Moreover, Bhuian and Mengue (2013) state that higher employee satisfaction correlates strongly with expatriate commitment in

organisations. Therefore, strong commitment to the home company often translates to better performance during expatriate assignments (ibid; Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Ipe, 2010).

In the context of this research paper, expatriate commitment is referred to as the level of loyalty an expatriate feels towards their home company during their foreign assignment. More specifically, the type of commitment studied is affective commitment, which refers to the level of emotional attachment that leads the expatriate to identify with their home organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993; Liu & Ipe, 2010). As past literature claims, the more committed an expatriate is to their home company, the higher their work ethic and performance is likely to be during the assignment (Meyer et al., 1993; Liu & Ipe, 2010).

Moreover, strong employee commitment and satisfaction is likely to minimise the risk of premature returns from foreign assignments (ibid). Successful adjustment is also a key driver towards enhancing expatriate satisfaction during their foreign assignments, which consequently boosts expatriate morale and job performance (Aycan, 1997; Caligiuri et. al, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Degen & Lund, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to research the connection between expatriate adjustment and expatriate commitment, to ensure that organisations can reap the rewards of their investments in expatriation.

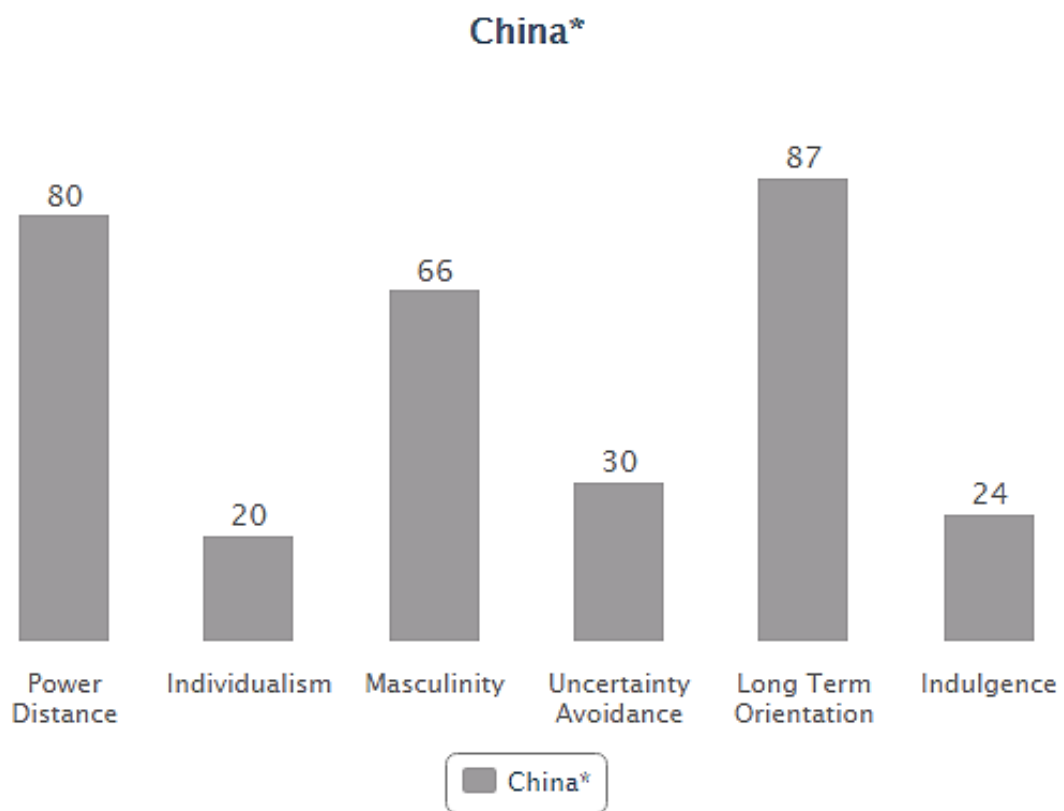
For this reason, researches highlight how essential it is to pin-point the factors enhancing expatriate adjustment and commitment. Expatriation is an expensive investment for multinational companies and can potentially reap high rewards by creating skilled global managers. However, not utilising these resources effectively can lead to significant losses of human resources and knowledge capital (McNulty and Tharenou, 2004).

### 2.3. Cultural Comparison between Finland and China

Cultural clashes are one of the main problem areas with Finnish expatriates to China, as the cultural differences are significant. Therefore, it is essential to have a thorough understanding of both cultures. Sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 discuss the main aspects of both Chinese and Finnish culture that could potentially have an impact on expatriate adjustment. Hofstede's cultural dimensions will be utilised to provide a sufficient comparison tool between the two cultures (Hofstede, 2016).

### 2.3.1. Chinese Culture

Chinese culture has its roots in ancient history, and is one of the oldest cultures in the world. For this reason, many of the values and behaviours of Chinese locals may seem odd from a Westerner's perspective. Chen (2001: 2) phrases this idea well, by stating, 'China is seen as the most foreign of all foreign places. Its culture, institutions, and people appear completely baffling—a matter of absolute difference, not of degree'. Figure 3 shows how Chinese culture ranks according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2016).



**Figure 3: Hofstede's Scale of Chinese Culture (Hofstede, 2016)**

As we can see from Figure 3, in terms of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, China places low on the individualistic axis. This emphasises the collectivistic nature of the culture, which is seen in all areas of life. This highlights the importance of the group, which often outweighs that of the individual (Hofstede, 2016). Essentially, Chinese people value the well-being of the group more than their own. In daily life, this translates to emphasised prominence on the extended family, loyalty towards colleagues in the workplace and overall national pride (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003; Hofstede, 2016).



Furthermore, the emphasis on collectivism can also be seen from Chinese negotiation and communication styles: they place high value on building relationships with members of the in-group. Chinese people have a concept of *guanxi*, which translates to building long-lasting relationships: this is an important aspect of negotiations. The pleasantness of negotiations is valued just as highly as a beneficial outcome, and should not be overlooked when doing business in China (Chen & Sheer, 2003; Jiang, 2013).

To continue on this topic, the collectivistic nature of Chinese culture and the importance of *guanxi* can also be seen in their communication style. As relationship-building and maintaining an air of pleasantness are important values in Chinese conversations, the communication style can be seen as relatively indirect (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003). China is also perceived as a high-context culture, meaning that a part of communication is ambiguous, with room left for interpretation (Hall, 1976). This indirectness and politeness is also mirrored in the Confucianist ideals that are strongly rooted in Chinese culture, as the belief system highlights the importance of pride and saving face. This can be perceived both in the workplace and in daily life, as people are careful of insulting or embarrassing others—in Chinese culture, this would be seen as a significant offence (ibid). Therefore, people are more cautious of their words than in the Western world and conversations are kept pleasant and polite.

On the other hand, though Chinese people are careful not to shame others or embarrass themselves, and are quite uncomfortable with foreign customs (Jiang, 2013), they still score low on the Hofstede scale on the uncertainty avoidance dimension. This translates to the culture being quite flexible to change. This aspect can be somewhat explained by the significant changes that China has undergone in the past decade, making the Chinese relatively accustomed to new situations. Furthermore, the Chinese language is complex and riddled with ambiguous meanings, which can be exceedingly difficult for foreigners to understand (Kaye & Taylor, 1997).

To continue, collectivistic cultures have an ideal of in-group and out-group people. People who belong to your in-group deserve your utmost loyalty, and include people you regard close to you: ranging from family members to people of the same nationality (Hofstede, 2016). However, people belonging to the out-group are often perceived as outsiders, and can be treated with caution or potentially even with hostility (Chen & Sheer, 2003; Hofstede,

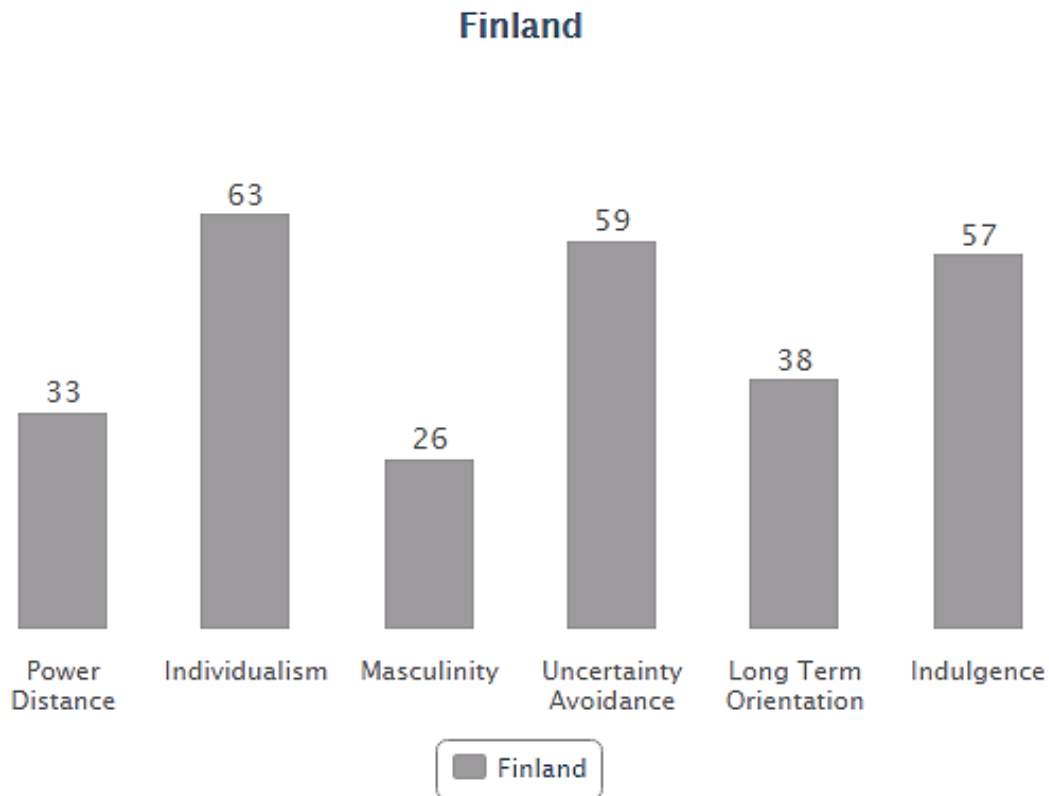
2016). The emphasis on in-groups and collectivism also has deep roots in Chinese business culture, as favourable treatment towards close friends and even nepotism are not uncommon (Chen & Sheer, 2003; Hofstede, 2016).

Moreover, as can be seen from Figure 3, Chinese culture has a significantly high power-distance (Hofstede, 2016). This issue is also addressed by academics, as it has a significant impact on the Chinese business culture (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003). In business context, this translates to a highlighted emphasis on hierarchy and ranks, with a significant power distance between higher and lower-level employees. Communication is generally top-down, as most of the decision-making is centralised to top-management (Hofstede, 2016). This makes decision-making relatively slow and complex from a Western perspective.

Furthermore, China is quite a masculine country on the Hofstede scale, and they rank low on the indulgence parameter (Hofstede, 2016). Essentially, this means that Chinese people tend to have a lower level of self-indulgence, and do not place as much value on having leisure time. Moreover, aspects of a masculine society that can be seen in Chinese culture include a high pressure to succeed, fierce competition and an orientation for success (ibid). Therefore, Chinese people take their work extremely seriously and value a tough work ethic.

### 2.3.2. Finnish Culture

Finnish culture is a relatively young culture, especially in comparison with the ancient Chinese culture, and has influences from various regions due to its geographic location and history. Figure 4 presents how Finland ranks on Hofstede's scale of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2016).



**Figure 4: Hofstede's Scale of Finnish Culture (Hofstede, 2016)**

Firstly, a key element of Finnish culture includes embracing feminine values, as on the Hofstede scale they are ranked low on the masculine scale (Hofstede, 2016). As a relatively feminine culture, Finnish culture values aspects like solidarity, equality and taking care of others (ibid). People are generally perceived as equal, and status is not highlighted in everyday life or in the workplace—people are quite secretive about money and bragging about status is considered rude. Furthermore, this fact is mirrored by the low power-distance index that can be seen from Figure 4: employees of all level are seen as equal assets to the workplace (Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences, n.d.).

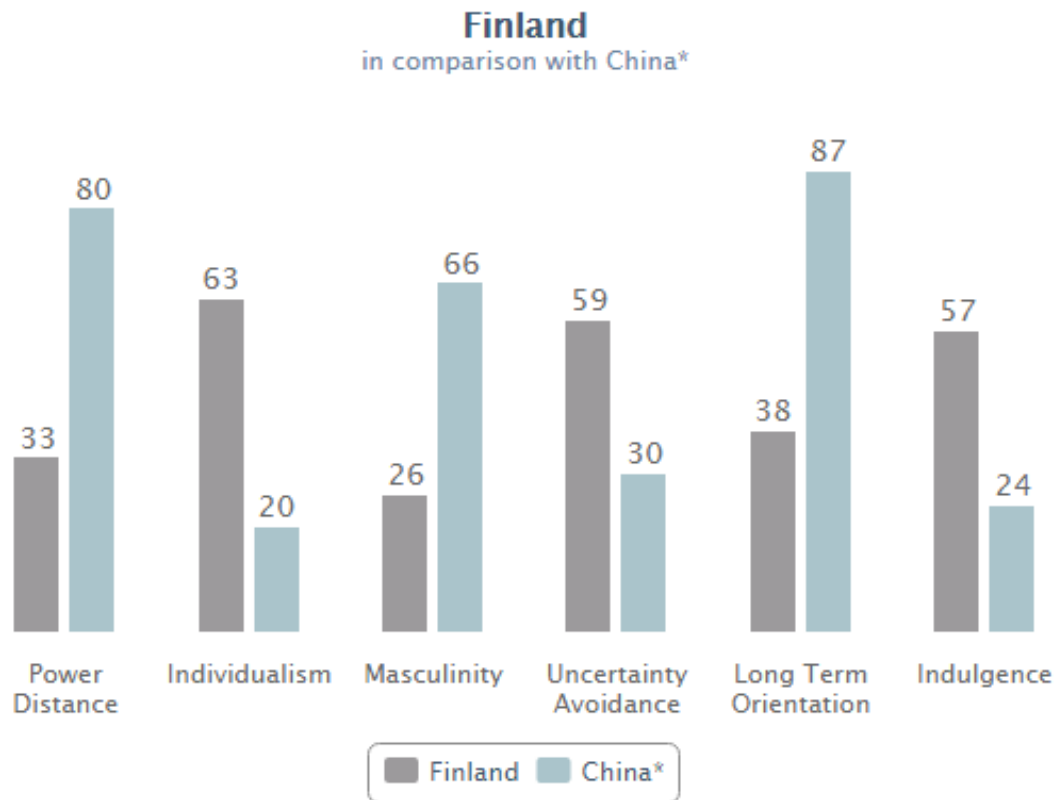
Moreover, the low power-distance of Finnish culture has a prominent impact on communication, both in the workplace and in daily life. The Finnish communication style is relatively direct and honest, and often informal (Hofstede, 2016). Carbaugh & Berry (2006) phrase this well, by stating that the foundation of Finnish communication is, 'Speak only if you have something to say; when speaking, be direct, truthful, and to the point'. This ties in well with Hall's (1976) theory of high and low-context cultures, as Finland is perceived as a low-context culture in terms of communication. Therefore, Finnish communication is direct, unambiguous and honest. Several academics (Carbaugh & Berry, 2006) also mention

the lack of a small-talk culture in Finland, which may be somewhat difficult for foreigners to comprehend. As an example of this directness, teachers are referred to with their first names in Finnish schools and titles are rarely used in daily life or in a workplace context (Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences, n.d.; Carbaugh & Berry, 2006). Therefore, people are viewed to be on the same level despite their background, and class distinctions are not emphasised in daily life. Moreover, this also translates to equal opportunity, meaning that all Finns tend to be on a similar starting point and have the potential to succeed (OECD Pisa, 2007; Hofstede, 2016).

To continue, Finnish people are culturally relatively individualistic, as we can see from Figure 4. Essentially, in daily life this means that there is an emphasis on the importance of the core family; parent-child, instead of the extended family as in collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 2016). Finnish people are also highly independent and there is a strong belief in making something of yourself – people are expected to take care of themselves. In business context, this translates to workplaces being quite result-oriented, and there is not as much emphasis on relationship-building as in Chinese culture (ibid, Federation of Universities of Applied Sciences, n.d.).

#### 2.4. Potential Factors Hindering Adjustment to Chinese Society

As can be concluded from the previous sections, Chinese and Finnish cultures are vastly different. This could potentially cause cross-cultural rifts and hinder the adjustment of Finnish expatriates on their assignments in China. Figure 5 shows the comparison between Chinese and Finnish cultures on the Hofstede scale, from which we can deduce that the differences are significant (Hofstede, 2016).



**Figure 5: Hofstede's Comparison of Finland and China (Hofstede, 2016)**

As discussed in section 2.3, and as is implied in Figure 5, foreign assignments to China present several potential problem areas and challenges for Finnish expatriate managers. Sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.3 discuss the most crucial challenges that managers may potentially face in terms of their daily life and professional life in China. The three sections discuss sociocultural challenges, communicational barriers and cultural issues in the workplace, respectively. These sections aim to highlight the magnitude of cultural differences between Finnish and Chinese cultures, which emphasises the importance of efficient support systems that enhance expatriate adjustment.

#### 2.4.1. Sociocultural Challenges

Daily life in China presents several possible obstacles for Finnish expatriate managers, as the culture is vastly different to what they are used to. Studies argue that the larger the distance between two cultures, the more difficult the adjustment process will be (Kaye & Taylor, 1997). China is not only geographically distant from Finland, but also culturally. This is exemplified in Figure 5 using Hofstede's cultural dimensions as comparison

parameters (Hofstede, 2016). As we can observe, the cultural differences between Finland and China are significant.

As mentioned in section 2.3.1, one significant element of Chinese culture that has a strong effect on daily life in China is collectivism, as China ranks high on the collectivism scale (Hofstede, 2016). The collectivistic ideal highlights the differences between the in-group and out-group; the in-group consisting of the close people like family, whereas the out-group consists of outsiders. The important status placed on favouring those in the in-group over everything else can lead to exclusion of members of the out-group. This could make integrating to the Chinese society exceedingly difficult for Finnish expatriates, as they may be observed as outsiders (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003; Hofstede, 2016).

#### 2.4.2. Communicational Barriers

The framework developed in Figure 2 identifies communication as a potential cross-cultural barrier hindering expatriate adjustment. This is especially the case with this case study, as one challenge that several academics argue is the most significant in China is the language barrier (Chen, 2001; Selmer, 2001). Not being able to speak Mandarin can cause major setbacks for expatriate managers in their daily lives, as the level of English spoken by locals is quite limited. Selmer (2001) actually states that English is of little use outside a professional context. This causes heightened stress and difficulty for expatriates and highlights the need for organisational support in general daily aspects, such as providing housing, taking care of taxation and providing transport (Aycan, 1997).

A poor grasp of Mandarin can further highlight the communication problems presented earlier, as a lot of information can be lost in translation, leading to misunderstandings and even unintentional insults (Kaye & Taylor, 1997). Furthermore, the level of difficulty of learning Mandarin is especially high for Finnish individuals, as it requires understanding tones which are not present in Western languages—not to mention a complex alphabet. Therefore, meaning is not transferred explicitly in Chinese, which makes mastering the languages that much more difficult for foreigners (Kaye & Taylor, 1997). Not having a common language with locals can lead to significant culture shock. In terms of the dimensions identified in Figure 2, communication in China could create a significant cross-

cultural challenge for Finnish expatriates in everyday life, both in terms of language and style.

Moreover, while English is spoken relatively well in the business context, the language barrier still exists in the Chinese workplace. Academics argue that a large proportion of Chinese individuals still rely on translators in some meetings: over 60% (Jiang, 2013). Furthermore, they are quite uncomfortable speaking English for risk of making a mistake or being embarrassed—again, this highlights the concept of saving face (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen and Sheer, 2003; Jiang, 2013). If there is a lack of common language, this could lead to serious misunderstandings and things lost in translation, which can hurt business and daily work. Also, speaking Mandarin is important not only as a communication tool, but as an effective way to gain the respect of Chinese colleagues (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Degen & Lund, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, Confucianism is deeply embedded into Chinese society, and can be seen in daily life: values such as pride and saving face are stressed in all situations. This is also observable in communicational aspects. As a high-context culture, the Chinese communication style is relatively indirect, ambiguous and emphasises politeness (Hall, 1976). This may be a difficult aspect for Finnish individuals to grasp, as they are accustomed to directness. These types of cultural clashes could cause major communication issues, and lead to unintentional embarrassment; which is a major insult in Chinese culture (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer 2001). This could cause not only clashes in daily activities and occurrences with locals, but also long-term issues with not being able to integrate into the Chinese society or befriend locals.

A further problem that is connected to the barriers in communication is the differing negotiation style in Chinese business culture. Chinese people place a significant emphasis on relationship-building and *guanxi* during negotiations, which can potentially make negotiations lengthy (Chen & Sheer, 2003; Jiang, 2013). This means that it is important that the negotiations are satisfying for everyone involved – a good outcome should not come at the cost of building lasting relationships. The Western negotiation style on the other hand is more direct and solution-driven, which would not be successful in the Chinese business context.

### 2.4.3. Challenges with Business Culture

Working in a Chinese environment presents several potential obstacles for Finnish expatriate managers, as the strong collectivist values are highly visible also in a business setting. Wen (2008) actually states that cross-cultural conflicts at the workplace are a leading cause for hindering expatriate adjustment in China.

Firstly, a major issue addressed by existing literature is the management style in the Chinese workplace. As mentioned in the earlier sections, collectivism and Confucianism are driving values in Chinese culture, therefore, they also have a strong influence on business culture (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003). In business context, this translates to a highlighted emphasis on hierarchy and ranks and a significant power-distance in the workplace (Hofstede, 2016). As the Finnish managerial style is generally quite *laissez-faire*, this aspect may prove difficult for expatriate managers, as this may distance them from their employees and could slow down decision-making processes. As expatriates generally fill managerial positions, this highlighted power distance and hierarchical management style are factors that would affect their professional life substantially.

In terms of the adjustment framework developed in Figure 2, this level of hierarchy and formal managerial style could potentially be a cross-cultural factor that hinders expatriate adjustment. Moreover, this highlights the need to consider the past professional performance of candidates, especially in terms of managerial competence. Due to the high power-distance and hierarchy, academics highlight that Chinese employees expect a significant amount from their expatriate managers (Degen & Lund, 2010; Josien, 2010). Therefore, if expatriates do not meet these expectations, respect could quickly be lost (*ibid*).

Furthermore, as Chinese employees are relatively uncomfortable with change and differing managerial styles (Jiang, 2013), expatriate managers may need to adapt their working styles accordingly. This emphasises the need to select expatriate candidates with sufficient international experience, as this would likely correlate with higher cultural flexibility and a willingness to adapt to the different professional setting (Aycan, 1997; Degen & Lund, 2010). Also, as identified in Figure 2, expatriate training plays a key role in the adjustment of expatriates to their new professional positions (Selmer, 2001; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Croker & Lee, 2006; Degen & Lund, 2010). In the case of China, expatriate training is a



necessity, as Finnish expatriate managers need to understand how to act in the different business environment, in order to enhance their professional success (ibid). As Degen and Lund (2010) mention, excellent professional performance in the home country does not necessarily translate to high performance in China due to the radically different environment.

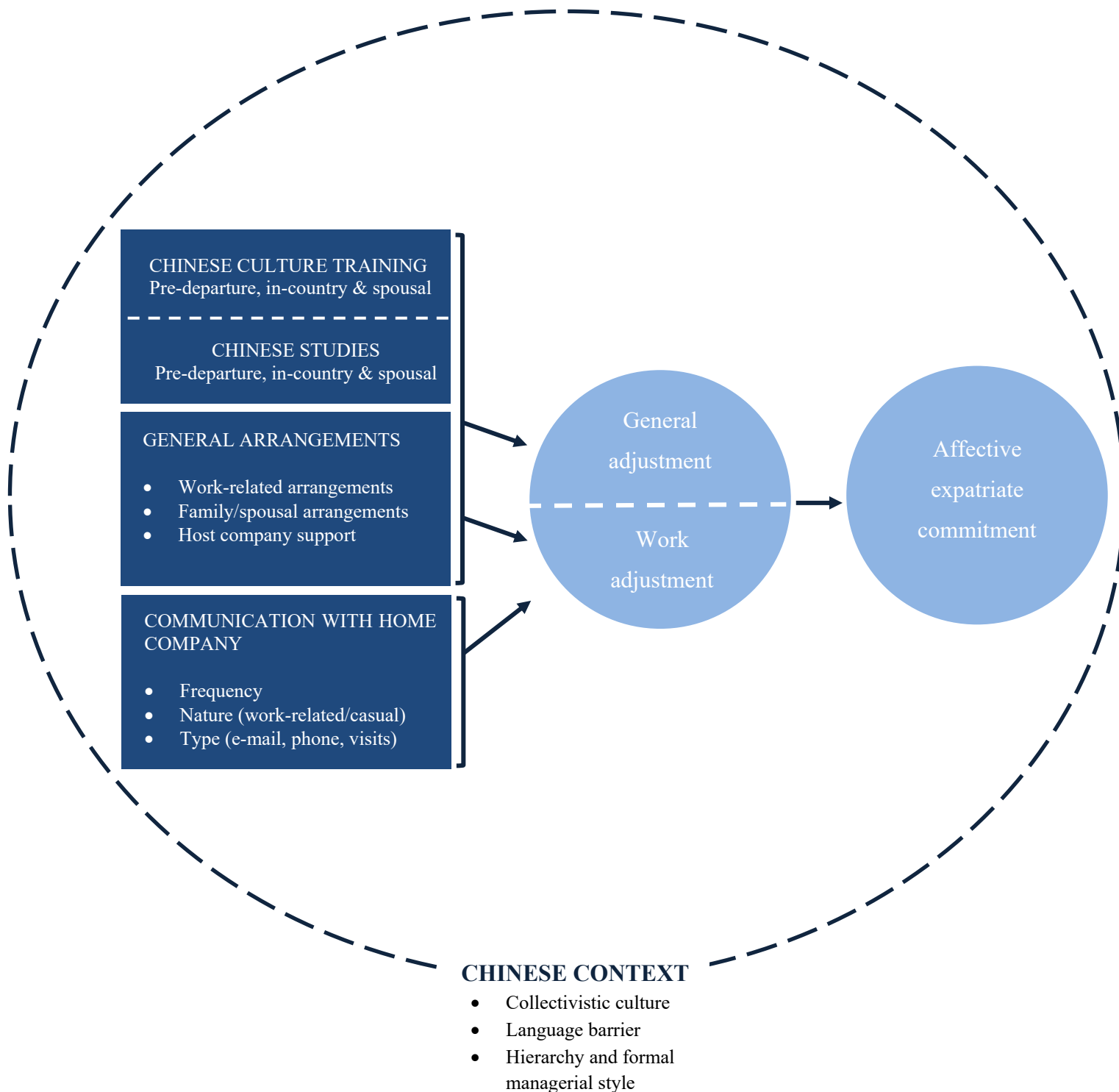
As mentioned, Chinese negotiation styles vary considerably from the Finnish norms. Due to the importance of not shaming others, Chinese individuals in the workplace could skirt over problems or not vocalise them as a way to preserve the face of their colleagues (Jiang, 2013). This may be difficult for a Westerner to comprehend, as they are more used to a direct and solution-driven communication style, where there is little room for hurt feelings (ibid). Therefore, this level of politeness may be a serious cause of frustration: Finnish people tend to value direct talk and honesty, as it saves time. However, ignoring or not being aware of the importance of saving face may cause conflicts with local colleagues in the workplace. This is because honour and pride are valued highly in Chinese culture, so embarrassing a colleague is a serious miscalculation (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen and Sheer, 2003; Jiang, 2013).

Additionally, as expatriates are often viewed as outsiders from the collectivistic viewpoint, it may be difficult for expatriate managers to create close working relationships with locals. However, creating networks and building relationships is an essential part of doing business successfully in China (Chen & Sheer, 2003; Jiang, 2013). Also, many academics state that building lasting and meaningful relationships with host country nationals is a crucial part of adjusting to the new culture (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007). Therefore, Finnish expatriates selected for foreign assignments in China need to possess certain personality traits appreciated in China, such as humility and openness (Degen & Lund; Aycan 1997; Deardorff, 2011). Furthermore, candidates need to be socially gifted; or be extraverts, as Aycan (1997) puts it, as building *guanxi* is highly significant in Chinese business culture. Degen and Lund (2010) actually state that the ability to build lasting relationships is the most crucial China-specific factor which expatriate managers should possess. In terms of the framework developed in Figure 2, this aspect of Chinese culture highlights the need to use personality as an important measure in expatriate selection processes.

## 2.5. Theory Framework

Based on the review of the current literature, China presents myriad cross-cultural issues for Finnish expatriate managers. The most amplified of these issues include communication problems, language barriers, conflicting managerial styles, strict hierarchical structures and a collectivistic mind-set (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Chen & Sheer, 2003; Degen & Lund, 2010; Jiang, 2013; Hofstede, 2016). As these factors could potentially hinder expatriate adjustment and commitment, it is essential that multinational companies focus more resources on solving these issues and easing the adjustment process.

For the reasons presented in the literature review, handling expatriate adjustment effectively should be a priority for multinational companies, to ensure the commitment of their employees. Losing skilled employee potential due to premature return to the home country, or poor performance during foreign assignments are significant setbacks for multinational companies. Figure 6 presents a potential framework to connect expatriate adjustment and expatriate commitment. Furthermore, it identifies key factors that have an impact on these phenomena in a China-specific context.



**Figure 6: Theory Framework**

As has become evident from the literature review, it is essential to take into account the specific cultural context when analysing expatriate adjustment. Cultural distance between the home and host country is a key attribute to consider, as this is closely tied with the level of comfort that an expatriate feels towards their new surroundings. As several researchers claim (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Black et. al, 1991; Kaye & Taylor, 1997), the level of

‘cultural toughness’: in other words, how difficult a culture is to penetrate from an outsiders’ perspective, has a significant impact on the speed and smoothness of expatriate adjustment. Therefore, in the case study of Finnish expatriates in China, the cultural context cannot be overlooked.

In a China-specific context, the key cross-cultural factors that would be likely to affect expatriate adjustment are the highly collectivistic culture, the language barrier, and the level of hierarchy and formal managerial style in the business setting. As mentioned in the literature review, the level of formality and hierarchy in a Chinese business context would likely be difficult for Finnish expatriate managers to be accustomed to, as the Finnish managerial style is relatively *laissez-faire*. Therefore, these attributes of Chinese culture could become a serious obstacle for expatriates. Furthermore, the highly collectivistic culture could cause issues for Finnish expatriates attempting to integrate into society and create relationships, as the collectivistic ideal highlights differences between the in-group and out-group—they could be seen as outsiders, and treated with suspicion (Hofstede, 2016). Moreover, the language barrier that exists in China is likely to create obstacles both in the workplace and in daily life, as several academics agree that this is the most significant challenge for expatriates (Chen, 2001; Selmer, 2001).

Moreover, in order to combat these cross-cultural issues and enhance expatriate satisfaction and adjustment, organisations should support their expatriate managers throughout the assignment. Successful support mechanisms from the home company have been tied to higher expatriate performance, adjustment and commitment (Aycan, 1997). Therefore, organisational support is a key attribute to be researched in the context of expatriate adjustment. Organisational support from the home company translates to means like expatriate training—cross-cultural and language—efficient communication and managing all practicalities of the assignment (*ibid*).

In a China-specific context, the significant language barrier that exists in both the professional world and in daily life highlights the need for adequate language training for Finnish expatriate manager—this is more of a necessity, than a choice. As the issue of language is highlighted in the Chinese environment, language training has been separated as its own dimension in Figure 6. Furthermore, cross-cultural training is not only recommended, but is a requirement, stemming from the significant cultural distance between

China and Finland (Degen & Lund, 2010). To continue, to ensure the commitment and overall satisfaction of their expatriate managers, companies should maintain a close relationship with them throughout the assignment. Effective communication to the home company can strengthen the psychological contract that an expatriate feels towards the home company, thus enhancing commitment, and minimise any feeling of abandonment (Tahvanainen, 2000; Lazaroova & Caligiuri, 2001). Also, the home company needs to adequately handle all practical matters linked to the expatriation process to maintain the satisfaction of their expatriates. These include aspects like housing, taxation, visas, and ensuring that spousal and family needs are met (Aycan, 1997).



### 3. METHODOLOGY

This section will cover the planned methodology used in this research paper. Section 3.1 will cover the overall research design utilised. Section 3.2 will go on to describe the specific research methods used in detail and section 3.3 will go on to provide an in-depth description of the sample profile used. Finally, sections 3.4 and 3.5 will focus on the data collection and analysis methods used in this research, respectively.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The aim of this research was to identify what constitutes expatriate adjustment and affective commitment, and then form an understanding of how adjustment affects affective commitment to the home company. The end-goal of the research was to be able to provide recommendations for multinational companies sending managers on expatriate assignments. The focus was on understanding the role of organisational support in enhancing adjustment, and thus, commitment. The research was approached from a case-study perspective, the specific case study being Finnish expatriate managers who have been on expatriate assignments in China. The specific research methods will be discussed further in section 3.2.

The research was approached from an interpretivist perspective in terms of epistemology. In this way, the respondent acts as the social constructivist, as the data will be interpreted through their perspective. Then, the data will be interpreted through the lens of the researcher, creating a double-loop learning pattern of data interpretation. Therefore, the knowledge will be constructed rather than merely observed. Interpretivist research is focused on understanding and interpreting aspects of human behaviour: understanding things like motives, meanings and different subjective experiences (Welch & Piekkari, 2006; Edirisingha, 2012). As adjustment and commitment are both highly subjective, psychological phenomena which are time and context-bound, this is the most appropriate research approach.

The literature review formulated a strong foundation for knowledge on the topic of expatriate adjustment and commitment in this specific case study context. Due to the subjective and context-sensitive nature of both phenomena, additional information was needed to analyse

the feasibility of the frameworks formed in Figure 2 and Figure 6 and to answer the proposed research questions. In order to understand the dynamics of expatriate adjustment and commitment, insight was needed from actual expatriates. This knowledge was obtained in the form of in-depth interviews with past expatriate managers. The details of how the interviews were conducted are discussed further in sections 3.2 through to 3.5.

### 3.2. Research Methods

Both primary and secondary research were utilised in this research paper. Secondary research in the form of a literature review was employed to gain a cohesive understanding of existing literature on the topic of expatriation. Furthermore, this was used to map out a framework which was then further applied to the primary research. For the primary research, qualitative research methods were used to gain in-depth information from past expatriates. The data collection methods employed to obtain this qualitative data will be covered further in section 3.4.

A qualitative approach was selected for this primary research for several reasons. As Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) highlight, qualitative research is mainly concerned with understanding, interpreting and gaining insight to certain issues, in comparison to the more statistical quantitative approach. Birkinshaw et al. (2011: 574) go on to describe qualitative research methods as a way for researchers to ‘be at one with their research phenomena’, and focus more on the meaning, rather than frequency behind certain phenomena. In this sense, a qualitative approach is the most fitting for this type of research, as it allows for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the complexities of expatriate adjustment.

This qualitative research was approached in the form of interviews. As this research was approached from an interpretivist perspective, the interview was relatively flexible in nature, to allow for emergent information to arise (Edirisingha, 2006). This also enables a more natural interaction between researcher and respondent, which further aids in capturing meanings and insights from human interaction (ibid). As Welch and Piekkari (2006) claim, from the interpretivist perspective, both interviewee and interviewer can draw from their shared knowledge of the world to make sense of each other; thus, constructing knowledge in this manner. Therefore, the most appropriate structure for these interviews was to formulate the questions in a semi-structured manner.



As the topic of this research is involved with understanding the subjective experiences of expatriates, how they reflect on their experiences is essential: adjustment is a psychological state. Therefore, this choice of research design was ideal, as it allowed the research candidates to reflect and speak relatively freely of their experiences, whilst facilitating a fruitful discussion. The questions were structured in a way which gave the interviewees room to discuss what they felt was important or meaningful, and the questions were used merely as prompts. Having a flexible structure and open-ended questions enhances the depth of answers and allows the conversation to flow naturally. Moreover, as Dearnley (2005) points out, it allows new concepts to emerge during the conversation, which could direct the conversation to territory not earlier considered.

The qualitative tradition employed in this paper was approaching the research from a case study perspective. The case study includes Finnish expatriate managers who have been on expatriate assignments in China. The research is exploratory, as the case study is utilised to test certain aspects of expatriate adjustment. This is the best qualitative method to construct the data, as it helps utilise the highly case-sensitive insight gained from the interviews, as a proportion of the information gained from the interviews was China-specific.

The interviews were designed based on the framework presented in Figure 6. The main goal of the interviews was to gain knowledge and insight from past expatriate managers, and thus, meet the objectives of the research study, which were discussed in section 1.3. Therefore, the focus was on researching how the respondents adjusted to the new surroundings, which factors had an impact on this and how this was connected to the commitment they felt towards their home company. The key aspect that was emphasised in the interviews was the role of organisational support. By planning the storyline of the interview questions around storytelling, a fruitful interaction during the interviews was facilitated. A tentative structure of the interview guide is presented in Appendix 1, including a translation of the questions into Finnish in Appendix 2.

### 3.3. Sample Profile

The sample profile selected for this research is Finnish expatriate managers with experience from expatriate assignments in China. Expatriate managers are the most appropriate source for this primary research, as they have personal experiences with expatriation and can give

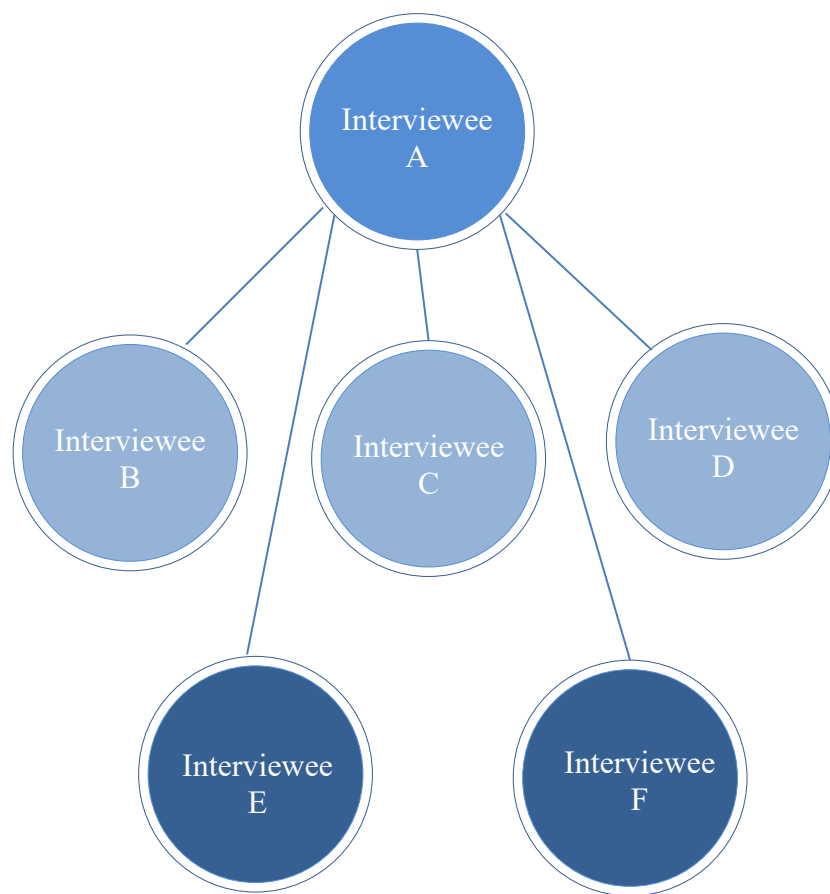
valuable insights that may be otherwise overlooked by companies. Furthermore, it is likely that these expatriate managers would be more inclined to be honest and non-biased in their interviews, than if interviewing someone from the home company.

In the qualitative research, six separate candidates were interviewed in the form of semi-structured interviews. All were of Finnish origin and had relevant expatriate experience in the Chinese region. For the sake of convenience, all the chosen interviewees had already returned to Finland, which made scheduling the interviews less challenging. Six interviewees is an adequate sample size for this type of research, as the interviews were lengthy and the insight gained from them was substantial. This is taking into account the relatively narrow scope of the research and the heterogeneity of the interviewees: being Finnish expatriate managers with international experience, all had fairly similar backgrounds. Therefore, in this context interviewing more than six people would not bring any significant further insights. As Dworkin (2012) has argued, once the information accessible from the interviews becomes saturated—meaning that no new or valuable information can be gained by increasing the sample size—interviewing more people becomes relatively redundant.

As there is quite a limited sample pool for these types of candidates, snowball sampling, also called chain-referral sampling, was employed. This is a sampling method that leverages the networks of the first interviewees to gain access to more potential interviewee candidates (Chaim, 2008). This is the most effective sampling method for this specific research, as it enabled easier access to suitable candidates. Furthermore, expatriate networks are commonly quite tight-knitted, so this approach was fruitful in gaining access to several appropriate interviewees. Moreover, as the quality of referrals through snowball sampling is largely connected to how content interviewees feel after the interview (Chaim, 2008), this type of sampling process was helpful in this context. This is because discussing expatriate experiences is generally something that people enjoy doing, therefore the expatriate managers interviewed were quite happy to refer other potential interview candidates. Though snowball sampling has been largely associated with just convenience and regarded as a secondary sampling strategy by academics, it also holds its own merit and can potentially give access to unique insights (Chaim, 2008).

In the context of this research, the first interviewee contact was accessed through personal connections—referred to as interviewee A for the remainder of this thesis. This interviewee

was able to give connections to a significant pool of Finnish expatriates with Chinese experience. This is due to the tightknit expatriate networks that remained strong post-assignment. The interviewees were initially contacted via e-mail, where the general topic of the research topic was explained briefly and their interest to participate inquired upon. All the contacted expatriate managers were happily willing to take part in the research. The structure of the snowball sampling process used in this research context is demonstrated further in Figure 7.



**Figure 7: Snowball Sampling Process Used in Research Study**

The backgrounds of the expatriate managers that were interviewed were fairly homogeneous. As the research topic is based on Finnish expatriate managers, all interviewees were of Finnish origin. Naturally, due to the selected research topic, all had some experience of expatriate assignments in China. As the research topic revolves around expatriate adjustment, it is necessary that all interviewees have experiences of longer term expatriate assignments, so that their adjustment process can be observed thoroughly. For this

reason, potential candidates with assignments lasting less than one year were not applicable to this research.

In terms of general demographics, all interviewees were male, between the ages of 31 and 50 and had spouses or families with them on the assignments for at least part of the time. The average age of the interviewed expatriates was 36. This is a relatively typical profile regarding the average expatriate in China, where the mean expatriate age in 2016 was 42 years, most were male, and over 60% in relationships (sampi.co, 2016). All the interviewed expatriates lived in Shanghai or in smaller, neighbouring cities. Shanghai is a huge, metropolitan city which has become the centre for international trade, so it is unsurprising that it has become one of China's biggest hubs for expatriation with over 200,000 expatriates in 2015—a figure which has most likely doubled since then (Qian & Elsinga, 2015).

Regarding career background, all the interviewees that took part in this research worked in middle or upper-management in the forestry industry. This relative homogeneity stemmed from the use of snowball sampling, as discussed earlier. All but one had some form of past international experience during their careers. The general demographics of the expatriate managers interviewed are displayed in Table 1. Table 2 then displays the career backgrounds of the interviewees. All this information is based on the expatriates at the time of their assignment; the moment in time when they started their assignments, to be more specific.

**Table 1: Demographic Background of Interviewees**

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Nationality	Family background
A	42	Male	Finnish	Family on assignment part of the time
B	31	Male	Finnish	Spouse on assignment part of the time
C	34	Male	Finnish	Family on assignment for the whole duration
D	36	Male	Finnish	Family on assignment part of the time
E	33	Male	Finnish	Family on assignment part of the time
F	50	Male	Finnish	Part of family on assignment part of the time

**Table 2: Career Background of Interviewees**

Interviewee	Industry of work	Occupational background	Previous international experience	Length of assignment
A	Forestry industry	Operations director	5-year expatriate assignment in the UK	2,5 years
B	Forestry industry	Operations development, management	3-year expatriate assignment in the UK	3 years
C	Forestry industry	Middle management	3-year expatriate assignment in the UK	3 years
D	Forestry industry	CEO	12 years work experience in Germany, 6 months in the UK	4 years
E	Forestry industry	Project development, maintenance	No relevant international experience	3 years
F	Forestry industry	Director of OCEAN area	3-year assignment in the UK, 3-year assignment in Sweden, 4-year assignment in Australia	3 years

All the interviewees selected fulfilled the criteria mentioned earlier in this section: they had completed an expatriate assignment longer than a year in China, were of Finnish origin, and had been in managerial positions on their assignments. The candidates were all eager and interested in discussing the topic, which suggested that the interviews would be insightful and offer substantial material to work with. In comparison with one another, the interviewees came from similar backgrounds and were somewhat alike in terms of demographics, which was to be expected. In the expatriate world of China, the demographics of Westerners are relatively flat (sampi.co, 2016). This is largely to do with the strict expatriate selection processes which companies undergo, which results in candidates of similar demographic nature being viable for expatriate assignments (Degen & Lund, 2010; Josien, 2012). As an example, the extensive managerial experience required from expatriates generally translates to expatriate managers being in their late 30s or early 40s: similar to the age demographic in this sample.

Prior to the interviews, it was considered whether the lack of diversity in the interviewees would limit the vastness of insights gained in the interviews. However, as expatriation to a foreign country such as China is an intense experience, people experience it very differently. Adjustment is also quite a personal and subjective process. Therefore, as was anticipated, the interview data displayed a significant variety in answers and experiences.

### 3.4. Data Collection

For the qualitative research, data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. All candidates were interviewed once for approximately 40 minutes, so there was a substantial amount of information to work with. The interviews were recorded, giving relatively freedom for interaction during the interview. Transcription of the interviews, note-taking and an initial analysis were conducted directly after the interviews, to ensure that the discussed topics were still fresh.

Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were asked some brief demographic questions. These were conducted via e-mail in order to conserve time during the actual interviews, as they may have hindered the natural flow of conversation and carried little qualitative value. The demographic questions included gaining information on the interviewees' age, industry and area of work, family background and any previous international experience.

Furthermore, the interviewees were informed ahead of time on the key topics of the research, so they could mentally prepare somewhat. As some of the interviewees had completed their expatriate assignments some time ago, this step was necessary to ensure the fullness of answers and minimise the risk of distorted memories.

The qualitative interview structure would be described closest to ‘romanticist’ in Alvesson’s (2003) framework, which translates to a heightened emphasis on rapport-building and interaction during the interviews. As the interviews were focused on gaining specific insight and highly personal experiences, it was essential that the interviewees would feel at ease and eager to share knowledge, which would be more likely in a relaxed setting. Moreover, I as the researcher had personal experiences from being part of an expatriate family, so treating the interviews as more of a discussion was the ideal approach in this context: it enhanced the sharing of knowledge. This is why the interviewees did not receive a list of questions beforehand, as this may have made the interviews robotic, and the aim was to encourage a natural flow of conversation.

The interviews themselves were conducted via Skype, and in Finnish to ensure that as much data as possible could be captured. The interviewees were initially given a choice between Finnish and English, to ensure they were as comfortable as possible and would be eager to share their stories. However, Finnish was recommended, and this ended up being the preferred language in all the interviews. Finnish was the preferred choice also from the researcher perspective, as this would maximise the amount of insight that could be gained from interviews. Finns tend to be more comfortable talking in their native language, thus the interviewees were likely to share more. As Welch and Piekkari (2006) claim, interviewees are more at ease and likely to give more authentic answers when being interviewed in their native language.

Furthermore, as Welch and Piekkari (2006) go on to say, having a common native language is not only a powerful tool in terms of verbal communication, but also in rapport-building. By conducting the interviews in the interviewee’s native language, you are indicating your willingness to step into their world and let them have some aspect of control in the interview. This is especially the case here, where using Finnish created additional workload in terms of translating and transcribing. Language also has cultural connotations, therefore using a common native tongue can assure that any nuances of language will not be lost in translation.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The data gained from the conducted interviews was analysed using thematic analysis, which is an analysis method that focuses on identifying key patterns and recurring themes in data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Boyatzis, 2009). Thematic analysis includes encoding the retrieved data into specific codes, which are then categorised under common themes. This type of analysis is focused on structuring and making sense of the vast amount of data and grouping it into meaningful categories (ibid). The main goal of the research was to identify underlying themes linked to expatriate commitment, adjustment and organisational support in the interview data. Coding was used as means to achieve this.

Both deductive coding and inductive coding methods were employed in this research. The former is focused on coding solely based on the existing literature and frameworks, whereas the latter concentrates on coding specifically from the research study (Marks & Yardley, 2004). On the one hand, focusing only on deductive coding does not account for emerging themes arising from the interviews, and on the other, using solely inductive coding carries the risk of formulating a vast amount of codes, which have no clear connection to the research study (ibid). Therefore, to mitigate this, both coding approaches were used in this research: this combination method is referred to as abduction (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Initial steps included listening to the recorded interviews thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of what was discussed and transcribing the interviews. The interviews were transcribed in Finnish, and then specific quotes that were utilised in the report were translated into English. The next stage included reading the transcribed interviews and literature review thoroughly, and determining the initial set of codes, which were based on the interview data and the frameworks presented in the literature review. The meaning of each code was also clearly defined. The initial set of codes included 48 codes, for example, the code *language barrier*, which was defined as *the barrier which hindered verbal communication with local people and how this made the expatriate feel*.

In order to reduce complexity and to ensure conciseness, some similar codes were grouped together. An example would be *local management style* and *differences in managerial attitudes*, which were both combined into the former. This was done for the sake of clarity



and cohesiveness, as both these codes had similar definitions. The meanings behind the codes were also refined. The finalised codes included 40 codes. The interview data was then coded based on this set of codes.

Next, 4 key themes were identified based on the research questions and the interview transcriptions. The themes were built on common aspects that were prominent throughout the interviews, and which were connected to the theory framework presented in the literature review. The data collected was narrowed down to these specific themes, as they bore the most relevance to what the research study wanted to achieve and were consistently present in all the of the interviewees. Emerging themes were also considered, however they were slightly disconnected from the research topic. As an example, the theme of *repatriation* came up often in the interviews, but as it was not connected to the research questions, it was ruled out. The finalised themes included *cultural context*, *factors impacting expatriate adjustment*, *impact of organisational support* and *perception of expatriate commitment*.

All of the finalised codes were then organised under the above-mentioned themes. All codes that were linked to sociocultural, communicational or business cultural aspects were sorted under *cultural context*. Any codes that included aspects that the expatriates felt had an effect on their adjustment process were then grouped under *factors impacting expatriate adjustment*. Furthermore, codes which were linked to different forms of organisational support were then grouped under *impact of organisational support*. Lastly, codes which were linked directly to aspects of commitment were grouped under *perception of expatriate commitment*. However, as expatriate commitment was the researched phenomenon and assumed to be an output of expatriate adjustment and successful organisational support, this theme was approached from the perspective that it was a product of all the thematic codes found. Therefore, this theme was analysed last, and all aspects that seemed relevant were included. Therefore, a multitude of the different codes mentioned were also coded under *perception of expatriate commitment*, even if there was overlap. Some examples of the codes employed, their definitions and their organisation are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3: Examples from Thematic Coding Process**

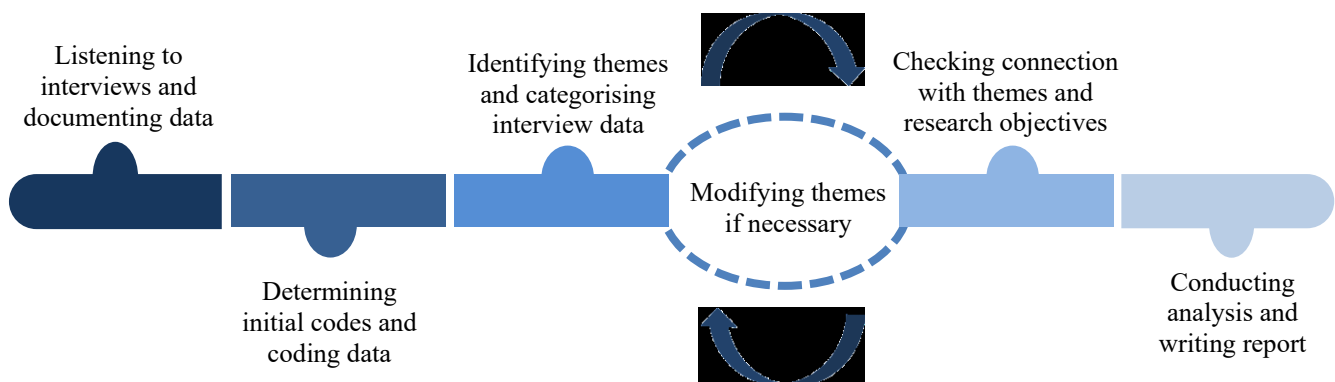
Code	Explanation	Theme
<i>Language barrier</i>	The barrier which hindered verbal communication with local people.	Cultural context
<i>Hierarchy</i>	The role of hierarchy in the local work setting.	Cultural context
<i>Family adjustment</i>	How the spouse and family adjusted to the new culture and how this impacted the expatriate.	Factors impacting expatriate adjustment
<i>Societal integration</i>	The extent to which the expatriate felt integrated to the local society.	Factors impacting expatriate adjustment
<i>Expatriate training</i>	Any cross-cultural training that the expatriate received to aid their adjustment.	Impact of organisational support
<i>Communication to home company</i>	The frequency and nature of communication between home company and expatriate.	Impact of organisational support
<i>Affective commitment</i>	The level of psychological commitment that the expatriate felt towards the home company.	Perception of expatriate commitment
<i>Commitment to assignment</i>	The level of commitment that the expatriate felt towards completing the assignment.	Perception of expatriate commitment

Once all the codes were categorised into themes, the literature was analysed once again in case any modification to the themes or codes was needed. Close attention was paid to the frameworks formulated in the previous section; these can be observed in Figure 2 and 6. The themes were scrutinised to ensure that they were well-connected to the research questions. At this point, the research questions and themes were fine-tuned slightly. Then, connection and relationships were made between the different codes. Examples of these relationships can be observed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Examples of Code Relationships**

Code 1	Code 2	Relationship
<i>Language barrier</i>	<i>Family adjustment</i>	The language barrier had a hindering effect on the adjustment of expatriate families.
<i>Expatriate training</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>	The expatriate training had a minimal effect on understanding Chinese workplace hierarchy better.
<i>Language barrier</i>	<i>Societal integration</i>	The language barrier had a significantly hindering effect against allowing full integration into the society.
<i>Communication to home company</i>	<i>Affective commitment</i>	Regular communication to the home company had an impact on workplace morale and slightly towards commitment to home company.

After this step, conducting the actual analysis was relatively straightforward, as the structure was thoroughly framed already. Once the themes were finalised, the data was then analysed, and the findings were reported. The full coding and analysis process is mapped and displayed in Figure 8.



**Figure 8: Thematic Coding Process Used in Research Study**



## 4. FINDINGS

This section will discuss the main findings of the research study in detail. Firstly, section 4.1. will cover the cultural context of the research, which includes aspects of Chinese culture that were impactful for the expatriates and a brief contextual summary of their daily lives. Section 4.2 will then go on to analyse the key factors which impacted their adjustment process. Section 4.3. will build on this and discuss the role of organisational support in terms these factors, and in enhancing expatriate adjustment. Lastly, section 4.4. will analyse the expatriates' perception on commitment to the home company, and how affective commitment was connected to adjustment.

### 4.1. Cultural Context

Firstly, as the research study was approached from a case study perspective, it is essential to discuss the context a little deeper, as this gives the frames for the analysis of adjustment and commitment. As the case study was of Finnish expatriates in China, this section will elaborate on the content of their daily lives as expatriates, the cultural context of China, and any general aspects that arose from the interviews. Section 4.1.1 will introduce any sociocultural differences that the expatriates observed, section 4.1.2 will discuss communicational differences further, and lastly section 4.1.3 will discuss differences in business culture.

#### 4.1.1. Sociocultural Differences

One prominent issue that arose from the interviews was the substantial cultural difference between Finland and China. Culture was an aspect that all interviewees mentioned at some point, as many mentioned that it was completely opposite of what they were accustomed to. The general attitude towards cultural differences was two-fold: one the one hand, cultural differences tended to hinder expatriate adjustment, but on the other, many interviewees said that it gave them a new-found appreciation for differences, and a broader worldview.

When interacting with locals, some interviewees mentioned that they had an issue with trust. They stated that an unfortunate aspect of living as a Westerner in the Chinese society was

that people may try to take advantage of you. A common and relatively minor example that some expatriates brought up was that locals may try to scam too much money off you, as Westerners were usually not accustomed to haggling. Interviewee A discussed some negative experiences when conducting any business with locals outside his work life: quite often things did not go as agreed. As an example, he mentioned that when ordering products from local producers, schedules often missed the mark and products did not work as promised.

*Interviewee A: 'It was quite common that especially Westerners were tried to take advantages of. There were many good companies and contractors, but then there were also the polar opposite. Con artists were highly common.'*

However, most of the interviewees felt that the local people were highly trustworthy and loyal, once befriended. Many interviewees stated that they had made local friends, who they still remained in contact with and could rely on. Interviewee E said that a key part of befriending local people was reciprocity: if you helped them, they would help you. He mentioned an example where he had helped a colleague with a tricky work case, and in return, received his eternal gratitude.

*Interviewee E: 'If you want to succeed with Chinese people, help them, and they will help you. In this way you can gain their loyalty, which is extremely important. Interaction in both ways is very important.'*

Moreover, many interviewees stated that Chinese people were a more open than Finns in terms of personality. As mentioned earlier, several of the expatriates had formed close relationships with locals. Interviewee E, for example, mentioned that he regularly played floorball with his local neighbours, and that this was an excellent way to integrate into the local community. Interviewee A also had many positive experiences and said that the locals were friendly and always seemed to be enthusiastic about everything. He also recalled that they were highly eager to join in on activities and be a part of things.

On the other hand, interviewee A said that sometimes this level of enthusiasm could become a slight cultural clash. He mentioned that in his experience, Chinese people could be a little nosy, and had a different understanding of personal space than Finns. Interviewee D also

mentioned something similar, as he said that it was sometimes frustrating when his family would get stared at when out in public, or if strangers came and touched his children's hair: something that would be found highly odd in the Finnish culture.

*Interviewee A: 'They [local people] are really friendly and nice, and somehow so positive all the time. They love to be a part of everything. Yeah, they are nosy and get involved in everything, but this is probably just because they like to be included.'*

To continue, some interviewees mentioned that the Chinese set of fundamental values and beliefs varies quite a bit from what they were used to in Finland. The aspect of money was discussed by many. Interviewee E stated that a Chinese person will most likely follow where the money is coming from, which meant that for example in the workplace, the person paying their salaries would gain the most respect and authority. Interviewee F had similar comments, saying that this was also visible in everyday life in China, as everything was measured in monetary terms: money determines the values they live by. Moreover, he stated that the Chinese understanding of social responsibility was highly different to what he was used to in Finland, and this was quite difficult to come to terms with.

*Interviewee F: 'The concept of social responsibility is missing in China. The collectivistic ideal can't really be seen in all day-to-day aspects. The streets are full of beggars [...] you didn't really see people helping others in need.'*

#### 4.1.2. Communicational Differences

##### *Language Barrier*

An aspect that was discussed in most of the interviews was the language barrier that existed in China, as none of the expatriates spoke Chinese prior to their assignments. Several interviewees, in fact, stated that it was the key struggle that they had in terms of life in China, as this impacted all aspects of their daily lives. The issues of language were especially highlighted in smaller cities in areas which were populated mainly by Chinese people.

*Interviewee D: 'I see it [the language barrier] as a significant obstacle. If you don't speak the language, you won't understand what's going on around you [...] This created quite a culture shock for us in the beginning.'*

Most interviewees stated that most of the communicational barriers came from interacting with locals in their everyday lives. This translated to issues with everyday occurrences such as commuting, which for foreigners in China usually meant taking local taxis, grocery shopping and using local services, such as visiting restaurants or barber shops. Interviewee E gave the example of language conflicts whilst using taxis: if the driver spoke no English; which was common, it would be a significant challenge to find the correct destination. Interviewee D also had similar experiences, and said he relied heavily on printed business cards with addresses of locations; though this still did not necessarily mean that you would get to the location you wanted. Many interviewees commented on similar tools that they relied on, such as calling a local friend to help with translation when the language barrier became too much of an obstacle.

*Interviewee C: '[When asked about communication] You are pretty helpless in the beginning. You had to be able to get through daily interactions like taxis, shopping, barbers, so that was a challenge [...] I started studying Chinese straight away, so that helped a little.'*

Furthermore, many interviewees mentioned communicational issues in the workplace. In this area, there was some disagreement amongst the interviewees. Some mentioned that English was spoken quite fluently in the workplace, and language barriers did not exist in the business context. As an example, interviewee C and F said that a large proportion of their colleagues spoke English relatively well, and communication was not a problem in this setting. However, three of the interviewees claimed that language was somewhat of an issue at work, as a significant number of employees did not speak fluent English, and some of the lower-level employees had no English skills at all. The language barrier seemed to be highlighted especially when interacting with the production workers, as many of the interviewees stated that they often relied on a co-worker to work as a translator when they needed to communicate with the production department.



Interviewee E took the perspective that language was an issue in work context, however was more of a slight roadblock than a complete obstacle. He explained that while often some things had to be demonstrated, and non-verbal cues like hand gestures had to be employed on a daily basis, the language barrier was not too bad. Interviewee B largely agreed with this and stated that very few issues were left unsolved due to a lack of common language.

*Interviewee B: '[Communicating with] the factory workers was a little more tricky [than with management], as they spoke poor English. You always had to have someone to help. Very quickly you learnt who to ask for help in these situations, so language was rarely a complete roadblock'.*

Furthermore, as none of the interviewed expatriates were native English-speakers, they did not find the workplace level of English too much of a problem. Interestingly, many found it easier to speak with local colleagues, as both parties were speaking non-native English. In fact, interviewee E commented that when he left for the assignment, he spoke somewhat unconfident English. However, as the local colleagues did also, it somehow alleviated the language barrier, as both sides could understand the struggle of speaking in a foreign language.

### *Differences in Communication Styles*

An aspect of culture that was mentioned several times were the cultural norms of communication that were present in China, especially so at the workplace. Many interviewees stated that the Chinese communication style was drastically different to what they were accustomed to, as the local colleagues were highly indirect. Essentially, this meant that meaning was not explicitly transferred from conversations and negotiations, as a lot was left unsaid. One observation that most of the interviewees made was how the locals were reluctant to discuss anything negative, or things that had not gone according to plan. 'Saving face' was a concept that came up frequently, as the interviewees said that the local colleagues avoided speaking too directly for fear of embarrassing themselves, or others. For instance, interviewee A observed that subordinates would often say what they thought the manager wanted to hear, even if there were issues.

*Interviewee D: 'It took some time before you began to understand the people. They didn't want to 'lose face', so they avoid saying no [...] they are reluctant to admit if something was not understood. When you were interacting with locals, you had to double-check that they had understood what you meant.'*

As the Finnish communication style is highly direct and the level of formality low, the interviewees were used to conversations being straightforward. Therefore, this level of indirectness caused conflicts at the workplace, as many interviewees stated that this could give a false sense of security that all work was going according to plan. Interviewee E explained how things that had been agreed upon would frequently not end up going as discussed in the workplace.

#### 4.1.3. Differences in Business Culture

Moreover, several interviewees noticed that drastic differences in the workplace communication styles also created problems with trustworthiness. Some aspects that were mentioned were problems trusting locals during negotiations, as they were reluctant to speak freely about important issues: problems were often swept under the carpet, which made it difficult to stay on top of what was actually happening in the workplace. As an example, interviewee A explained how they had some serious conflicts with some of their subcontractors due to products not functioning as agreed, but during negotiations, the locals would just laugh when the problems were addressed.

*Interviewee E: 'Sometimes you assumed that things were going great and as agreed in meetings, but Chinese people don't work that way'.*

Another thing that was mentioned was some lack of trust towards local subordinates. For instance, interviewee A said that subordinates would not want to reveal any mistakes made and would rather try to cover them up as well as possible by themselves, than admit to their supervisor that there were problems. Interviewee D also had similar experiences and said that you had to be highly proactive and follow up on everything carefully to ensure that they were done. For example, he mentioned that if a project was likely to be late, it may not be informed about ahead of time.

One significant cultural difference that the interviewees noticed in the workplace was the level of hierarchy. Many interviewees stated that in Finland, they were used to a relatively flat hierarchical structure, where management would be seen equal with employees. However, in the Chinese workplace, they noticed that the differences between status were much more pronounced, and roles between supervisors and subordinates were more black and white. Interviewee B explained that the chain of command had to be respected at all times, as all decisions came from the top, which slowed down processes quite a bit. Bosses were expected to give direct orders and also to be angry if things did not go as planned. An interesting example from Interviewee F was that in a work-related dinner, employees would sit at the table until the boss left, no matter how long it took. This highlights the highly hierarchical structure of the employee-boss relationship in China.

Furthermore, according to the interviewees, the level of hierarchy was reflected in the local attitudes towards the manager. Interviewee F explained that the employee-boss relationship was vastly different to the relaxed style we are used to in Finland. In China, authority and the opinions of the manager were not questioned. Locals had a lot of respect for authority, and especially having a Western boss was something to be proud of. On the other hand, a lot was also expected of managers. Interviewee E observed that locals appreciated managers who were hard-working, highly visible in the workplace and reachable at all times. For example, this could mean having to supervise the factory at any hour. Essentially, the Chinese employees did not appreciate a '9 to 5' boss.

*Interviewee F: 'In Europe the boss-employee relationship is based on job descriptions and responsibilities, but in China, it is more a division of authority and respect. The organisational hierarchy is clear: in China, you work for your boss. There is a clear respect for authority'.*

Moreover, the level of initiative that the employees had was much lower than in Finland, according to the interviewees, perhaps partially due to the strict hierarchical structure in the workplace. Interviewee B said that the local employees would wait to receive orders from higher up before taking action. Compared to what was customary in Finland, Chinese employees needed more specific instructions and more supervision, which meant the expatriates needed to shift their managerial styles somewhat. Interviewee A largely agreed

with this and stated that the local employees were hard-working and would do as they were told – but if they were not told anything, they would do nothing.

To continue, one aspect that was mentioned often regarding the Chinese mentality was that they are driven by money to a much larger extent than Finnish people. Interviewee F explained that as salaries were so low and social support system was quite non-existent, the locals' well-being relied almost solely on their salary. Therefore, they were much more inclined to switch jobs even for seemingly small salary improvements.

*Interviewee F: 'Employee loyalty is not very high in China, due to the low salary and poor social security. Job-hopping is common. In Western cultures, people usually have other motivators also.'*

Interviewee A and E also made similar comments, saying that employee turnover at the workplace was relatively high, which created its own problems with human resources and recruiting. Working at a Western company was a highly valuable asset for the local employees, so they became appreciated in the Chinese job market. Interviewee A stated that as soon as the employees had gained sufficient know-how and insight from the workplace, they were likely to switch jobs relatively quickly.

## 4.2. Factors Impacting Adjustment

Secondly, as the research study was focused on distinguishing factors that have an impact on expatriate adjustment, this was discussed thoroughly in the interviews. The section will be further divided into sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, which will discuss the factors that impacted general adjustment and adjustment to the workplace, respectively.

### 4.2.1. General Adjustment

#### *Family Adjustment*

One aspect that many of the expatriates discussed in the interviews was the adjustment of their families. All of the expatriates had either a spouse or families with them on the assignment, at least for part of the time. Their experiences with family adjustment were

somewhat divided: for some, the families adjusted fine, and for some, they did not enjoy the new surroundings.

Both interviewee F and C stated that their spouses were not entirely happy about the assignment prior to leaving, and that it was not an assignment they had wished for. Interviewee C actually said that his spouse had stated ‘anywhere, but China’ before the selection process. Interviewee D also mentioned that his spouse experienced serious culture shock in the first six months of the assignment, and even suggested going home. This led to them having discussions about returning home prematurely in the beginning, however, not to a very serious degree.

One obstacle that clearly hindered the spousal adjustment of the expatriates was that most of the spouses did not work themselves. Interviewee A said that it was quite challenging for his spouse to adjust to this new role, having used to working full-time back home. Interviewee C made similar comments and said that this was one of the key factors that hindered spousal adjustment. He said that this also affected his adjustment and willingness to stay in China longer, and he felt quite ready to return once the assignment was over. Contrastingly, interviewee B’s spouse worked full-time in China, in a job that she enjoyed. Interviewee B stated that this clearly helped her adjust to the new surroundings, and the experience may have been much more challenging otherwise.

*Interviewee C: ‘Not having a job was tough on my wife. She didn’t really adjust to the expatriate way of life, as she wanted to work also. So, my wife wanted to return [to Finland].’*

In terms of spousal adjustment, interviewee F stated that one of the key problems was that China was such a difficult society to integrate into, and the families lived in an ‘expatriate bubble’, so to speak. Most of the expatriates lived in some form of a Westernised compound, therefore were quite isolated from the Chinese society. Interviewee F explained that this in itself was quite trying, as you did not even have a chance to integrate into the local surroundings. Interviewee A had similar comments and mentioned that it felt quite odd for the family to adjust to the expatriate way of life, where it was the norm to have drivers and *ayis*, which is the Chinese word for domestic helpers. Many interviewees referred to this as a separate expatriate dimension, as it was so separate from the local society.

*Interviewee F: 'It was not really a dream assignment [for my wife] you can't really get inside the local life. You live in an isolated expatriate commune, how long is that really enjoyable? I don't really know.'*

As the expatriate managers spent a majority of their time at the workplace, the spouses had to deal with adjustment relatively alone. However, many expatriates mentioned that there was a 'network for Finnish women' that their spouses found helpful in terms of adjustment, as this gave them some mental support from people in similar situations. Many of the spouses also studied Chinese in their free time; some even at the local university, therefore this aided their adjustment somewhat. Interviewee F mentioned that this was one of the key reasons that he slacked a little from studying Chinese, as his spouse spoke it well enough to get by.

On the other hand, many of the expatriates recalled that once their families were a little more adjusted, going through the expatriate experience together was highly positive. As an example, interviewee D stated that despite the struggles in the beginning, his family fell in love with China, and they have visited it repeatedly after the assignment. Interviewee A and B also stated that it was an irreplaceable opportunity for their families, as they got to see such a new world together and share their experiences with loved ones.

*Interviewee B: 'My spouse fell in love with China... It was great to experience new places and things together. We are both very open-minded people.'*

From the expatriates who had children with them on the assignments, most recalled good levels of adjustment. All of the school-aged children went to reputable international schools and were able to integrate into that setting rather well. Interviewee D said that one of the key factors enhancing the adjustment of his family as a whole was that their basic family needs were met. As providing good schools for his children was an important criteria for him, he felt the home company handled this smoothly. Interviewee F continued along the same lines and mentioned that his daughter had no problem adjusting to the new international milieu. Interviewee A recalled that it took a little time for his children to adjust to the new setting, but after that, the weeks started running by smoothly. Interviewee C mentioned that as his son was so young at the time, he adjusted quickly without any hitches, and also learnt Chinese well enough to speak it with the compound gardeners and their *ayi*.

Unfortunately, some of the expatriates' families ran into some negative issues during their assignments. Interviewee C explained that while his son adjusted well to the surroundings, his health may have become an issue in the long-term, as he had asthma, which was somewhat aggravated by the level of pollution in Shanghai. Interestingly, upon their return to Finland, he stated that his son is no longer asthmatic. Interviewee E also was in a difficult situation, as would have preferred to stay longer in China, however his new-born daughter and spouse did not settle well into the local environment. Therefore, his return home was strongly impacted by familiar obligations.

### *Language*

As mentioned earlier, most of the expatriates found the language barrier to be a struggle in everyday life. Many of the interviewees also mentioned their restrictions with communication as being a key factor that hindered adjustment to the Chinese surroundings. Interviewee A mentioned that in the beginning of his assignment, speaking Chinese and communicating with locals was the biggest struggle for him: though he recalled it was not a 'show-stopper', but more of an obstacle. Interviewee F also said that compared to his expatriate assignments in Western countries, it was much more challenging to adjust to China, and that language was a key factor in this.

*Interviewee D: 'If you don't speak Chinese, you don't really have a leg to stand on. Language was definitely the biggest obstacle affecting adjustment.'*

Furthermore, some interviewees saw language as a tool to better adjust to the local society, as it also had cultural connotations. Interviewee D stated that learning Chinese could also help you get more submerged into the culture and understand the local ways of thinking better. Interviewee B mentioned that just learning a little bit of Chinese helped him adjust better to the local community, as just by saying a few words, locals would get excited and be more inclined to interact with you. Furthermore, he said that as his language teacher was Chinese, studying the language was an excellent method to become more in-touch with locals. Interviewee E also said that he had a local friend who helped him with all kinds of language issues. Therefore, language could be seen as a tool to build relationships with locals and adjust to the culture more smoothly.

## *Expatriate Networks*

When discussing adjustment, many expatriates mentioned the strong expatriate networks as being helpful. Interviewee F recalled that his adjustment was made easier by the fact that he knew what to expect, as he was familiar with several of the local expatriates prior to the assignment, who gave him ‘insider tips’ to life in China. He said that this helped him navigate in the Chinese surroundings. Interviewee B, C and D made similar comments, stating that expatriate colleagues and the strong networks with other foreigners aided their adjustment process, as it gave them peer support and someone to share similar experiences with.

*Interviewee C: ‘Other expats, local networks, and other Finnish colleagues helped the adjustment process. The networks were very strong, I got to know a lot of foreigners living in China that way.’*

The expatriates found these local networks to be helpful in many ways, mostly in alleviating the effects of culture shock. Interviewee D mentioned that as he had been in contact with many foreigners with China-experience prior to his adjustment, the new surroundings did not come as such a drastic surprise to him or his family. Moreover, many of the interviewee said that the strong foreigner networks helped them both adjust and remain content on their assignments, as it mitigated the feeling of homesickness. As an example, the local Finnish society organised events for the expatriates, like a party on the Finnish Independence Day.

## *Relationships with Locals*

Some of the interviewed expatriates also mentioned that their relationships with locals helped their cultural adjustment. Local relationships had a similar effect to the foreigner networks mentioned earlier: they helped the expatriates gain insight to the local culture. However, this also helped them understand the Chinese perspective to certain aspects of culture, which aided the adjustment process.

*Interviewee E: ‘One reason why my assignment was so successful, was the people I be-friended. It’s important to make lasting relationships with locals, also outside the work setting.’*



Interviewee E explained that he made some close local friends on his assignment and was sad to leave. He said that his manager, who was his good friend, was even in tears on his last day. He said it was moving to see how open the locals were to forming lasting relationships, and that having local contacts was the best way to submerge yourself into the culture. Interviewee B agreed that the locals were open people, once you befriended them. He continued to explain that taking Chinese classes with a local teacher was helpful in terms of adjustment, as it helped you form local contacts.

Many of the interviewees also found local contacts to be helpful in practical aspects of life, which in turn made their adjustment easier. As mentioned in section 4.1.2, some mentioned that local friends were able to help them when they ran into issues with language; via phone, for example. Interviewee C also stated that one of his local colleagues helped him in hiring a local *ayi*, and in any other daily struggles that he faced.

### *Integration to Society*

In terms of integration into the Chinese society, none of the expatriates felt that this had fully happened during their expatriation. As mentioned in section 4.1.1., the expatriates observed significant differences between the Chinese and Finnish cultures. Interviewee C said that while his strategy towards cultural adjustment was a ‘When in Rome’ approach, there were aspects of the culture that could never understand, such as spitting in the streets. Interviewee D said something similar, stating that as the mindset of locals was so different to his, some parts of Chinese culture were simply incomprehensible. As an example, he unfortunately witnessed an accident on the motorway, and saw Chinese people had gathered around it to laugh. From a Finnish perspective, this was an extremely odd response, but is a good representation of how differently people can react to certain stimuli. Interviewee D went on to explain that Chinese culture is one that people generally tend to have a strong opinion about, as it is so far apart from Western norms.

*Interviewee D: ‘Chinese culture is a culture of opposites: you either love it or hate it. My predecessor disliked it, but I personally loved it, along with my family.’*

Many of the other expatriates also mentioned that as the Chinese culture was so vastly different to what they were accustomed to, it would take years to fully penetrate it. As an

example, interviewee F stated that the fundamental values of the locals were so far from his own, that it would have made integration to the culture highly difficult, if even possible. Interviewee D made similar comments, saying that the differences between the Finnish expatriates and the local ‘average Joe’ were so drastic, that he could not claim to be fully integrated into the society.

Moreover, one factor that hindered integration to the society and even the adjustment of the expatriates, was how they were treated by locals. Many of the interviewees observed that Westerners were treated highly differently to locals and even seen as a different caste. As was mentioned in 4.1.1, some of the interviewees had negative experiences while interacting with locals: for example, interviewee A mentioned that there were many instances when locals would try to trick money off him. He also said that Westerners were sometimes referred to as *lao wan*, the direct translation for which is ‘big nose’. This highlighted how they were seen as completely different to locals. Interviewee F also said that there were certain local people who harboured some hostility against Westerners and made it quite clear. Then again, being Western also meant receiving preferential treatment to locals in some instances: as an example, receiving better service in restaurants.

On the other hand, as interviewee C explained, full integration was not necessarily the expatriates’ goal, as many mentioned that the most important thing was that their families felt content and comfortable. Interviewee F largely agreed with this and stated that as they lived in an expatriate bubble, their living habits were worlds apart from the locals’. He continued to explain that his was one of the key reasons that adjustment to the local society was so challenging, when compared to his other expatriate experiences in Western cultures. As expatriates lived in an isolated reality that was completely incomprehensible to the Chinese people; the average local lived in poor conditions, it made adjustment difficult. He said that for this reason, you could never really become a member of the local population.

Table 5 presents a summary of the key general adjustment factors discussed in the expatriate interviews. The table provides further explanations of the factors, and their perceived impact on the adjustment of the expatriate managers.

**Table 5: Key Factors Impacting General Adjustment**

Adjustment factor	Explanation	Example Quote
<i>Family Adjustment</i>	The level of comfort that the expatriate's family/spouse felt to the local surroundings. Observed positive impact on expatriate adjustment.	'In the beginning, it [the new setting] was probably quite a mystery for them [...] Adjustment to the new school took some time. It didn't take very long, after all.'
<i>Language</i>	The language barrier that existed in daily life. Observed negative impact on expatriate adjustment.	'In the beginning, you were really helpless. Basic everyday interactions were a struggle [...] Even going grocery shopping or to the barber.'
<i>Expatriate Networks</i>	The strong support systems that were formed of other expatriates living in China. Observed positive impact on expatriate adjustment.	'My expat colleagues were my best support system. They helped me get started, good peer support [...] I made some great friends.'
<i>Relationships with Locals</i>	The level of interaction and relationships with local people. Higher interaction had positive impact on expatriate adjustment.	'I really liked the Chinese people, they were trustworthy, loyal, friendly [...] I still have many true friends from there.'
<i>Integration to Society</i>	The level that the expatriates felt in-tune and integrated into the local society. None of the interviewees felt integrated to society, therefore correlation could not be observed.	'In China, Westerners are seen as different [...] In all aspects, you are seen as part of a different caste. I think integrating to the society would take a long time.'

#### 4.2.2. Work Adjustment

##### *General Working Environment*

In terms of their general working environment, the interviewed expatriates had positive things to say. All of them stated in some point of the interview that one key motivator for going on their expatriate assignment was the job offering, and what it meant for their career development. Many of the interviewees saw it as a smart career move and were driven by

the new challenges that would come with it. Therefore, the stimulating work environment had quite a motivating effect in terms of expatriate performance.

*Interviewee B: 'I didn't want to stand still forever. I knew that in a foreign environment you would have to learn new things fast, so that was motivating.'*

In terms of their life in China, many of the expatriates stated that their life revolved around work, and that their schedules were tight. Most of the interviewees commuted long distances, so they stated that the workdays were quite lengthy, and there was rarely time for much else than work during the weeks. The interviewees stated that this kind of work environment was challenging, but also highly rewarding. Interviewee F, who was part of developing company operations in South-East Asia, said that seeing your own impact on the company progress was very motivating. Interviewee E also had highly positive things to say about his work, as he said that it was a great time in his career. He really enjoyed working in such a dynamic environment and said that the sense of drive that people had in the workplace was a significant motivator for him to perform well.

On the other hand, interviewee B recalled that the hectic work days made adjustment tough, as constantly learning new things was quite tiring: sometimes you just wanted things to function as in Finland. Interviewee F made similar comments, as he said that whilst on assignment, he could not find the time to study Chinese due to his busy work schedule, which could have made a significant improvement in terms of adjustment.

*Interviewee C: 'You really had to go all in, the working days were very different to Finland. It was very intensive, our lives were mostly work.'*

All of the interviewees held the Chinese work ethic and morals in a positive light. Interviewee F also said that the Chinese organisation was highly professional. Most interviewees found the local employees to be very hard-working people, and fast learners, once given proper instructions. The local workers saw working with Westerners as something to be proud of, and this showed in their work. All of the interviewees found this type of work environment to be quite exciting, as there was a sense of drive in the employees. Therefore, this was quite a motivating factor in terms of expatriate performance and adjustment to the workplace. As an example, interviewee A said that as he came to

understand how hard to locals worked in order to improve, his own enthusiasm and adjustment to the local work community grew.

To continue, due to the high morale in China, Interviewee E stated that he actually felt a sense of reverse culture-shock upon his return back to work in Finland. In his opinion, progress was sluggish and people were not as enthusiastic to be working. He stated that the contrast to Chinese working habits was drastic, as in China development was fast and people had a strong drive to work hard. Interviewee B agreed partially with this, as he also mentioned that Finns tend to be a little negative in the workplace, and the Chinese employees were more optimistic and enthusiastic.

*Interviewee B: 'Chinese people were very forward-going. They were motivated to develop themselves and improve. They were always ready to start working hard once something had been decided.'*

#### *Differences in Hierarchy and Managerial Style*

Many of the interviewed expatriates mentioned the differences in hierarchy and managerial style as the key cultural aspects that they had some trouble with adjusting to at the workplace. As mentioned in section 4.1.3, these differences were quite major. Furthermore, this was not helped by the fact that many of the local employees, especially those working in production, were relatively inexperienced. Therefore, they needed quite a bit of guidance and supervision in their daily work.

Interviewee A and E both recalled that in the beginning, there were instances where they assumed that things were progressing as planned, but actually nothing had been done: the Chinese employees were quite timid to take initiative and required active supervision. Interviewee D also said that you had to be more proactive in following up that things were actually completed as agreed. Many of the expatriates stated that it took some time to adjust their managerial styles, as they had been used to a relatively laissez faire approach in Finland. Many of them mentioned that, at times, this was quite frustrating.

*Interviewee A: 'In the beginning, I was a bit frustrated with the local employees, because it felt like they only fumbled and messed about [...] Of course you have to remember that I'd always been in companies with very experienced staff, so I was used to strong performance. Some of the local people were just beginners.'*

On the other hand, the interviewed expatriates did not find the local business culture too demanding to adjust to, after they had grown more accustomed to it. The main factor enhancing adjustment seemed to be understanding the Chinese business culture, and how it manifested in the workplace. Interviewee E stated that his manager, who was Chinese, was a substantial help, as he was able to explain the behaviour of the local employees. Interviewee D stated that the key factor that helped him settle into the new work community was simply to acknowledge these cultural differences and try to understand how the locals functioned in the business world. Many other expatriates agreed with this and stated that the first few months were the most challenging in the workplace, but after this, it grew easier.

Moreover, interviewee F stated that as he was aware of these cultural differences beforehand, they were not really an issue for him. This was due to efficient communication within the home company and his past experiences of working with South-East Asians. Furthermore, he mentioned that working with other expatriates made the working life quite pleasant and straightforward, as they already had experience of working in China. Interviewee E also said that as the team he worked for was largely formed of Europeans, it was relatively easy to get started. Having other foreigners around him helped the adjustment to the local working culture. Interviewee C somewhat agreed with this, as he said that business culture had evolved a little due to the many Finns and other Westerners working there.

### *Communication at the Workplace*

As mentioned in section 4.1.2, the interviewed expatriates were somewhat divided when asked about workplace communication: some felt that there was a clear communicational barrier that hindered adjustment to the new work setting, but some had no issues.

The main communication issue seemed to be with the local employees working in production, as many of the interviewees stated that they spoke little to no English. Interviewee E and B both stated that when communicating with the factory workers, they

needed to rely heavily on visual cues like hand gestures. However, they both stated that the key to adjusting was to understand who to ask for help, when communication became an issue. The local managers who spoke better English were helpful and willing to translate whenever necessary, according to the interviewees. Therefore, the language barrier was not a significant issue in the work context, as long as the expatriates had sufficient means to help them overcome possible communication problems.

Furthermore, several expatriates mentioned that once they learnt some Chinese, this was an efficient tool in enhancing rapport and relationships with their local colleagues. Interviewee C mentioned that even if they could never speak Chinese fluently, the local colleagues appreciated even small efforts. He explained that being able to joke around in Chinese did a lot for the office team spirit. Interviewee B made similar comments and said that his workplace Chinese skills improved gradually, by using a little more each week. He commented that it was a nice form of relationship-building to be able to carry out small conversations or small-talk with the local employees.

*Interviewee C: 'Most of the managers spoke English. A big proportion of the employees didn't. But we had quite a lot of small-talk in Chinese, that was nice.'*

### *Expatriate Attitude*

Many of the expatriates strongly felt that key to efficient workplace adjustment was tied to their own attitudes and mindset. Interviewee E and C both felt that adjustment was enhanced by having an open mind and being ready to jump into a completely foreign setting. Interviewee B agreed with this and said that attitude was the key to a successful expatriate assignment. As an example, he mentioned that he knew some expatriates who were not particularly interested in adjusting, as they knew they would be going home eventually. Therefore, they did not take the time to study Chinese or the local culture, and this effected how well they integrated into the society: they were clearly more distanced from the locals.

Moreover, in terms of attitude, some of the expatriates mentioned that it was important to assert yourself as part of the team, and not try to seem more important than others. Interviewee E stated that by having this type of humble mindset, he was able to integrate well into the work community: they local employees were welcoming and kind to him.

Interviewee B had similar opinions and said that by emphasising that he was working as an equal, he started to see positive change in local colleagues, and he was more welcome into the ‘inner group’. Furthermore, he said that if he had put himself on a pedestal, so to speak, local colleagues would not have been as hospitable.

*Interviewee E: ‘Don’t pretend to be better than you are! You shouldn’t put yourself above others, or regard others as stupid. Your own attitude is crucial. If you be yourself, [local] people will surely be welcoming.’*

Table 6 presents a summary of the key work adjustment factors discussed in the expatriate interviews. The table provides further explanations of the factors, and their perceived impact on the adjustment of the expatriate managers.

**Table 6: Key Factors Impacting Work Adjustment**

Adjustment factor	Explanation	Quotes from expatriates
<i>General working environment</i>	The general working life: schedules, typical days, work content. Perceived to impact adjustment both negatively and positively.	‘Weeks were spent at work, commutes were long so we had very limited free time [...] Quite hectic schedules, it took some getting used to.’
<i>Hierarchy and Managerial Style</i>	The hierarchical structures in the workplace and the local managerial style that expatriates had to adapt to. Perceived to impact adjustment negatively.	‘In Finland, you’re used to dealing with different levels. In China you always dealt with the top of the ladder, had to respect authority [...] This slowed down processes a bit.’
<i>Communication</i>	Communicational issues at the workplace due to language barriers or differing communication styles. Perceived to impact adjustment mostly negatively.	‘Not nearly everyone spoke English [at the workplace]. Some of the white-collar workers spoke a little, but not that well’.
<i>Attitude</i>	The attitudes and mindsets of the expatriate managers: open-mindedness, flexibility, patience. Perceived to impact adjustment positively.	‘I left Finland with the attitude that ‘now I’m going to work in a completely weird environment’. And I can say that adjustment [to the workplace] happened quite fast.’



### 4.3. Impact of Organisational Support

Thirdly, one of the interests of this study was to identify factors that influenced expatriate adjustment, and how they were impacted by organisational support: or if this had any impact at all. The role of organisational support was therefore an important point of conversation in the interviews and will be further discussed in this section.

The section will be subdivided into relevant types of organisational support. 4.3.1 will discuss language training, 4.3.2 any cross-cultural training that the expatriates received, 4.3.3 the practical arrangements of expatriation and 4.3.4 the level of communication with the home company.

#### 4.3.1. Language Training

All being of Finnish origin, none of the interviewed expatriates had any Chinese language skills prior to being selected for the assignment, therefore had to begin learning from the very basics. Most of the interviewees took some Chinese classes whilst on the assignment, one also prior, but many stated that in their hectic schedules, making the time to learn a completely new, challenging language was difficult. Interviewee E mentioned that the only time he really had for studying the language was during his commutes. Interviewee B also mentioned that whilst on assignment, it was quite tiring to constantly learn new things, as you were already stretched quite thin at work with the tight schedules and responsibilities.

One of the expatriates did not study Chinese at all during his assignment. Interviewee F said that he did not really allocate time for language classes, which he regrets. He said that the key issue was simply time: his expatriate assignment came with almost no warning, therefore he felt that he did not have adequate time to prepare for it. While on assignment, he said it was easy to prioritise language studies last. Looking back, he stated that if there would have been more time to prepare, he could have benefited significantly from studying some Chinese prior to the assignment. Nevertheless, all the interviewed expatriates would have had the possibility to study Chinese if they wanted to, fully financed by their employers.

For many of the expatriates, the first few months were spent both working intensely and studying Chinese. Interviewee A stated that in the beginning, a large chunk of time was

allocated to studying Chinese, in order to speak it even a little and be able to function in these surroundings. He felt that this was more of a necessity than a choice, as without any Chinese skills, you would be lost. Interviewee B had similar ideas and stated that while he knew he would never become fluent, learning the language had a significant impact on adjustment outside the work setting—though the language studies were tough on top of everything else. Interviewee D said that in his view, the language barrier was the most significant obstacle to adjustment, therefore studying Chinese was an absolute must. All the expatriates who studied Chinese on their assignments felt that this was positively correlated to general adjustment.

*Interviewee D: 'When going to China, one vital thing in my opinion is that you start learning the language. This is crucial both in everyday life and to some extent in the workplace [...] This is highlighted in China, a lot more important than in other countries [when comparing to other expatriate assignment in Europe].'*

Several of the expatriates had private Chinese teachers, who were of local origin. Interviewee B explained that interacting with his teacher was a good gateway to the Chinese society, as it helped him understand the locals better. He also said it was a great way to begin building relationships with locals. As mentioned in section 4.2.2, both interviewees B and C also used Chinese to a small extent in the workplace in the form of jokes and small-talk with colleagues and said that this had a positive effect on office spirit. Therefore, language studies also had some effect on helping adjustment to the workplace.

All but one of the expatriates who studied Chinese started their language studies while on assignment. Interviewee B had also taken some classes prior to the assignment and said that this helped a little to hinder the initial culture shock. This seemed to be a beneficial strategy, because as many of the expatriates mentioned, allocating time for the language lessons while in the country was tough. Interviewee A also mentioned that he would have found pre-departure language lessons helpful. The average amount of language classes per week was one or two, and most of the expatriates taking language lessons had private teachers, which were fully financed by their employers. Interviewee B said that learning in small groups could also be beneficial: the peer support could enhance the expatriates' motivation to study.

*Interviewee B: Learning the language was a must. I think it was a crucial point that I wanted it, and wasn't forced into it [...] Though it could almost be compulsory. It was also important in terms of cultural learning, as with the language, you learnt so much more [about China and the Chinese culture].'*

Several interviewees said that the company would have also offered language lessons for the spouses, if necessary: many of the expatriates' spouses did take up on this offer. As an example, interviewee F explained that his spouse spoke much better Chinese than him, which made his life a little easier, as she was willing to translate in day-to-day interactions. Many of the spouses were highly motivated to study Chinese, as their daily lives were focused around functioning in the local society—most of them did not work in China. Therefore, as many of the expatriates explained in the interviews, these language classes were a necessity towards ensuring efficient spousal adjustment. Interviewee D even mentioned that his spouse became so enthusiastic about Chinese, that she went to study it at a university level.

#### 4.3.2. Cross-cultural Training

Cross-cultural training was also a form of organisational support which was discussed in some of the interviews. Surprisingly, only one of the six interviewed expatriates mentioned having received some form of cross-cultural training. Two of the interviewees did not mention cross-cultural training at all as a tool that they would have found helpful for adjustment. The others discussed the role of expatriate training in general but had not received any training from their home companies.

Firstly, interviewee A, who did receive cultural training both prior to his assignment and on assignment, stated that it was beneficial in terms of understanding the culture and adjusting to new surroundings. In Finland, both him and his spouse took part in a day-course, which taught them about general aspects of Chinese culture, people and what living in China is like as a foreigner. He did mention that the course could have been a little longer in order to get more out of it, however, he reminded that due to his busy work schedule, he would have had very little time to allocate for this before leaving for his assignment.

Upon his arrival in China, interviewee A took part in a week-long course at the local university, which was called 'How to be an expatriate in China'—this was a little more

specific to the working environment. When asked about adjustment, the first thing he mentioned was the cultural training, as he said it helped him both understand alleviate the initial culture shock, understand the local mindset and know more about the Chinese culture. Interviewee A found the local culture to be fascinating, and said once you got some perspective, you learned to appreciate how ancient and rich the local culture is.

*Interviewee A: '[When asked about what aspects helped adjustment] The training was a big factor [...] My wife and I both received cultural training before the assignment. I also took part in a 'How to be an expatriate in China' course at the local university'.*

Interviewee B and D, who had not taken part in any cross-cultural training, both mentioned training as a potential factor which could enhance adjustment. Interviewee B stated that his company did offer some short classes, but he unfortunately was not able to take part. In his opinion, having a few short classes would not necessarily have made a crucial difference in his integration to China. However, he felt that holding the training sessions a few months after beginning the assignment could be beneficial for adjustment, as by then you would have grown a little accustomed to the Chinese way of life: you could make comparisons to your own experiences. Furthermore, it would bring a higher level of practicality into the training classes, as you could better employ the things you learnt into daily life. Interviewee D also mentioned the aspect of practicality and said that going through cultural differences and potential conflict areas in a more day-to-day approach would have made adjustment easier. He was not offered any cultural training from his home company but had heard that other companies organised these; he, too, would have found it beneficial.

*Interviewee D: 'People have such different mindsets [when comparing Finnish and Chinese people]. When you understand the logic behind their thinking, it makes adjustment easier. If these issues were discussed in a practical way, then cultural training would have helped.'*

Interviewee F also mentioned the point of cross-cultural training but mentioned that it was something that he had not really missed. From all the interviewed expatriates, he had the most extensive experience abroad prior to his Chinese assignment. Therefore, he felt that his own expatriate experience and the fact that he had travelled around Asia a significant amount

on work-related trips were both enough ‘training’ for him: China actually marked his fourth expatriate assignment.

#### 4.3.3. General Arrangements

When discussing how the home company handled all the general arrangements linked to the expatriate assignment, all the interviewees had relatively positive things to say. In terms of ensuring that all family and spousal needs were met, most expatriates felt that these were handled well by the home company. Interviewee A stated that all practical aspects that he could think of were arranged without a hitch. This included all aspects from organising children’s schools to accommodation for the family. In his view, the key thing that helped his adjustment was that he did not have to stress about any of the arrangements and could focus specifically on the well-being of him and his family. Interviewee C also felt that all practical arrangements were handled well and the actual move went without major issues.

Interviewee D made similar observations and stated that ensuring the basic building blocks of a good family life is crucial for adjustment, especially in the first months of the assignment. Therefore, he found it especially important that his home company handled all family-related aspects in such an efficient way. Some key things that he mentioned were reputable schools for his children, a nice home, and a good health care system. Interview F also mentioned that the so called ‘expatriate component’ of the assignment was handled without any problems.

*Interviewee D: ‘The basic family elements need to be taken care of. It is very important to have good accommodation, good schools and health care for your family. These really supported the adjustment of the whole family.’*

Moreover, the interviews all felt that job-related arrangements were handled reasonably well. This included aspects like expatriate salaries and local bureaucracies. Several expatriates mentioned that not having to start off with a significant amount of complex paperwork at the office had a positive effect on work adjustment, as they could concentrate solely on the job they were selected for. Furthermore, the home companies also took care of highly complex issues like the Chinese taxation system: interviewee A and F both explained that their home company had hired a consultant to take care of all their taxation, so it was not a concern for

them. Interviewee A explained that as the company he worked for had such extensive experience of sending expatriates to the Asian region, there were no major bumps in the road in terms of general arrangements, therefore he could focus on working and adjusting to the new office community.

To continue, many of the expatriates commented that the host company was helpful and welcoming in all aspects. Interviewees A, B and C all commented on the professionalism of the local HR department, saying that they were highly knowledgeable on expatriate issues. Interviewee A was impressed by how well resourced the host company was: anything he needed at the workplace could be organised almost in a snap of a finger. Furthermore, they were willing to help with any problem, large or small. As an example, interviewee C mentioned that the local HR director came with him to IKEA to buy furniture for his family.

*Interviewee A: 'The host company helped us immensely. They organised everything for us at the snap of a finger. The company was very well resourced and professional. If we ever needed anything, they made it happen.'*

Interviewee E largely agreed with these points and said that he never had any issues with local HR—all potential issues were fixed easily and quickly. He also stated that a nice aspect of the host company culture was that the locals were eager to get them involved in all kinds of events. This made him feel included and welcome, which made adjustment to the workplace relatively pleasant. For example, he said that he was invited to a Chinese wedding.

Moreover, many of the expatriates stated that their home company organised a visit to the country beforehand—some even had family along with them. The expatriates mentioned that this was a great way to alleviate stress about the expatriate assignment, as they got to see the local environment, people and were a little more in tune with what to expect. As some of the expatriates left for the assignments before their families, the home company also organised visits. Interviewee A recalled that the home company financed flights his spouse and daughter to visit China a few months before the family's departure from Finland. This visit included visits to the potential schools and being a part of the house-hunting process. He stated that this was a nice touch from the company, as it helped his family have a better understanding of what living in the Chinese environment meant for them. Interviewee F also

said that there were never any issues with organising flights for him or his family whenever needed: it was generally a matter of one e-mail to HR, and the tickets would be booked.

In terms of improvement aspects, interviewee F mentioned that his expatriate assignment came with very little warning, giving him almost no time to mentally prepare. He said if he could have had a little more warning, even six months, he would have had more motivation both for completing the assignment and towards studying the language beforehand. In his opinion, having enough notice would be a key factor in enhancing expatriate adjustment, as this would aid in organising practicalities on the home country end and developing necessary cultural and language skills. Furthermore, it could have increased his enthusiasm towards the assignment itself, as he mentioned that he was not altogether excited about it when it was first introduced to him: it came at a bad time in terms of his children's studies, his spouse was not too enthusiastic, and the decision itself was quite sudden.

#### 4.3.4. Communication to the Home Company

The last key factor of organisational support that was discussed in the interviews was the level of communication that the expatriates had with the home company while on assignment. In this aspect, the expatriates had quite varied experiences. Furthermore, their opinions on the impact this had on adjustment differed slightly.

Firstly, some of the interviewees felt that their communication to the home company was frequent enough, and they felt supported on their assignments. Interviewee A mentioned that he did not feel that he needed that much communication to Finland once he got accustomed the new workplace, as the host company was so supportive in all aspects: there were always people who could help in conflicts. He also stated that this level of trust from the home company helped him function well at the workplace. Interviewee E was also satisfied with this level of trust, as he mentioned that local managers had the authority to make decisions, which was a positive thing.

To continue, interviewee D was also relatively happy with the level of communication he had from Finland. He recalled that he had frequent contact with his home company and said technology played a large role in making daily communication so effortless, mentioning video calls as an example. He felt content with the level of support he received, and said it

had a positive influence on his workplace adjustment and motivation for high performance. He did mention, however, that a majority of his support came from the host company, rather than from the Finnish end. Interviewee F had quite similar experiences. He stated that communication itself was almost daily, at the very least weekly, but this was strictly work-related reporting and updates on progress. He said that he did not need frequent check-ups and was quite happy to work relatively independently. During his yearly performance appraisal, he said that there might have been some conversation about his personal well-being and adjustment, but that was it: though he did not really feel that he missed this.

*Interviewee F: 'The communication to Finland was some weeks daily, but at least weekly. They didn't really ask 'how are you doing?', but I didn't really feel that I needed that. Professional reports went out frequently.'*

Contrastingly, interviewees B and C felt that there could have been some improvement with the communication to the home company. Interviewee C was in the unfortunate situation that his home company factory was run down during his expatriate assignment, therefore they did not have adequate resources for this type of support. He mentioned that his 'home company' was changed to the company headquarters, but he did not have much communication with them. He mentioned that it would have helped his adjustment to the workplace a little more if he would have been more supported from the Finnish end: though these unfortunate circumstances could not be helped.

Similarly, interviewee B also felt that the home company could have been more active in terms of communicating, and he found this slightly de-motivating. He felt that the home company was not actively enough present in the daily life of the expatriates: after the beginning had been organised, the expatriates were left to their own devices. While he claimed that this level of trust was motivating, he said the company could have made a little effort to ensure the well-being of their expatriates, as they were significant investments. In his view, receiving frequent information from the Finnish end would have also been beneficial, so it would have been easier to keep up with developments. On the other hand, he said that this needs to be quite tailored towards individual needs, as some expatriates needed more communication and support from the home company than others.



*Interviewee B: 'The home company was not 'present' enough in daily life. After the beginning was handled, we were left to our own devices, and they assumed that we would be fine. The communication was quite weak, apart from work-related aspects.'*

Table 7 summarises the types and forms of organisational support that were discussed in the interviews. The support types are ranked based on the findings, indicating how beneficial the expatriate managers found these—or would have found these—in terms of enhancing adjustment. The support type that had the highest impact was general arrangements and the lowest impact was from the level of communication with the home company.

**Table 7: Types of Organisational Support Observed**

Type of Support	Different forms of support	Quotes from Expatriates
<i>General arrangements</i>	<p>Daily arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flights home</li> <li>• Pre-departure visit</li> <li>• Accommodation</li> </ul> <p>Family arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family visits</li> <li>• Safe living compound</li> <li>• Schools &amp; healthcare</li> <li>• Visas</li> </ul> <p>Work arrangements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host company support</li> <li>• Competitive salary</li> <li>• Taxation</li> <li>• Job position</li> </ul>	<p>'The host company was very welcoming. We were invited to all kinds of local parties and events, which felt really nice. I was even invited to a local wedding.'</p> <p>'The general support was important. Even though you are far away, alone, you were given the tools needed to succeed. This was very motivating.'</p>
<i>Language training</i>	Language classes prior to and/or during expatriation, language classes offered for spouses also.	'Learning the language was an absolute necessity, it could even be compulsory.'
<i>Cross-cultural training</i>	Courses on Chinese culture and living environment. Offered for spouses also.	'Cultural training could be organised while on assignment, it would be more practical'.
<i>Communication with the home company</i>	Nature and frequency of communication with home company. E-mails, reports, phone calls, visits to and from home company.	'Communication to the home company was weak, they didn't really have the resources for this. Basically there was very little [communication].'

#### 4.4. Perception of Commitment

Lastly, the focus point of the research was to understand the connection between adjustment and commitment, therefore this section will discuss the expatriates' perception of commitment to the home company. The section will be further categorised into two. Section 4.4.1 will discuss the link between adjustment and commitment, and section 4.4.2 will then go on to discuss whether organisational support facilitated commitment.

##### 4.4.1. Link Between Adjustment and Commitment

As discussed in section 2.3.4, this research study was focused on understanding the affective commitment of expatriates. Therefore, the element of commitment discussed in the interviews was focused on the psychological contracts that the expatriates had with their employers, and whether this was impacted by their level of adjustment.

As adjustment is highly subjective and personal, the expatriates also had quite varied experiences. In terms of general adjustment, one of the key contributors towards this seemed to be the adjustment of the expatriates' families and spouses. There seemed to be a clear connection between overall expatriate satisfaction and the happiness of their families on the assignment. As an example, interviewee B mentioned that his spouse was well adjusted and satisfied with her life in China, as she was able to work herself and found the culture fascinating, therefore helping his overall motivation for the assignment. Overall morale towards the assignment seemed to be correlated towards having a strong commitment to the home company, as interviewee B stated that felt a strong dedication to the home company. Interviewee D also mentioned how crucial it was to ensure the general building blocks of a happy family life, as this played a large role in his adjustment, morale and commitment to the assignment; thus, the home company.

On the other hand, expatriate F had some problems with initial adjustment, due to his family situation and personal motivations. As mentioned earlier, his home company had informed him of these relocation plans quite suddenly and it took some time before they had persuaded him to go to China. This also marked his fourth expatriate assignment abroad and came at a bad time in terms of his children's studies. Furthermore, he was not altogether convinced of the necessity of living in China, as he was doing a similar job as in Finland: just the location

was different. His spouse also had some trouble adjusting to the local environment, as this was not an ideal assignment for her. Interviewee F said that all these factors played a part in his initial adjustment and general feeling of happiness on the assignment. However, he also said that he was still strongly committed to the home company, as he had such a long history with them: he had worked at the same company for over 24 years at this point.

To continue, interviewee F explained that one aspect that was important in terms of raising his work morale, motivation and commitment was how much he enjoyed his job. He said that as an expatriate, you received more myriad responsibilities and challenges in the work setting, but that this was highly rewarding. He was part of developing the organisation's operations in South-East Asia and said that it was incredibly motivating to see your own impact in the company future. Many other expatriates also mentioned the aspect of trust as key to enhancing their motivation for high performance and sense of commitment towards delivering the best results for their home company. For example, interviewee D stated that in his opinion, it was crucial that the home company had strong dependence and trust in your performance. He said that the expatriate managers were given relatively loose reins to act, and that this was highly motivating in terms of his dedication to the home company.

*Interviewee F: 'I felt strongly committed to the home company, then. I had worked there for 24 years by this point. I was part of developing the company operations in South-East Asia and seeing your own handprint in this was highly motivating [...] Therefore, my degree of engagement and commitment was also high.'*

Moreover, all of the interviewed expatriates stayed on their assignments for the entire duration—most of them actually ended up signing longer contracts than what was originally planned. Interviewee D was the only one who considered returning prematurely in the beginning due to adjustment issues; though not to a serious extent, but then also ended up staying longer than originally discussed. He, also, felt strongly committed to the home company, thus was motivated to perform well and stay on his assignment.

When asked about their commitment to the assignment, most of the interviewees equated this with their commitment to the home company. Essentially, this stemmed from their dedication to the home company: they had been selected for a certain job, the home company had high trust in them to complete it, therefore they felt a strong desire to do well and

complete it as agreed. Interviewee E did mention that he would have liked to stay longer, as he felt highly committed to the company and to achieving great things on his assignment: he found the workplace stimulating and motivating. However, he had to return home, as his family did not adjust to life in China.

*Interviewee E: 'I felt very committed to the home company, that was a great time in my career. I got to work at a job I enjoyed and got real 'kicks' from! It was an incredible feeling that came from succeeding. It gave us all motivation to perform well.'*

#### 4.4.2. Organisational Support and Commitment

As the role of organisational support was a centre of focus in this research study, the connection between organisational support and commitment was discussed also in the interviews. The target of these discussions was to understand whether organisational support facilitated expatriate commitment in some form.

An aspect of organisational support that was discussed in several interviews was trust. As mentioned in the previous section, the expatriates were happy with the level of responsibility they received and felt that the home company had strong faith in their capabilities. For example, interviewee C mentioned that he had gone through an aptitude test in Finland, to ensure that he was the correct fit for the job. After completing this successfully, he felt that the home company had full conviction of his abilities to succeed on the expatriation. He said that the level of responsibility he received on expatriation was highly encouraging and made him want to rise to the challenge. This also gave him a strong sense of commitment to both the assignment and the company he worked for. Interviewee B made similar comments and claimed that as the expatriates had been hand-picked by the home company for this specific job, the company also expected high things from them. In his view, this sense of two-way trust pushed him to higher performance and enhanced his strong commitment to the company: he still works for the same company to this day.

*Interviewee B: 'There was a high motivation to do well. The home company placed a lot of expectations on us: we were given much more responsibility. We were both and investment and a risk, so they put a lot of trust in us. This was very motivating [...] I felt very committed.'*

Moreover, as mentioned in section 4.3.3, most of the expatriates were satisfied with how their home company handled the general arrangements of their expatriate assignment. As interviewee E mentioned, he was impressed with how well the home company took care of the actual people on the assignment, rather than just regarding them as employees whose basic needs have to be met. He said that the fact that the company was concerned over his well-being was highly encouraging, as he felt supported in his daily life. He had highly positive feelings towards his home company and said this played a role in how strongly committed he was to the assignment and his employer.

Overall, all of the interviewed expatriates described their assignments as successes. The extent to which they felt this was due to organisational support varied quite a bit between interviews. Interviewee A felt that the assignment would not have been so successful, if the home company had not been so professional and supportive in every aspect: he said this was largely to do with the company's extensive experience on sending expatriates to Asia. Furthermore, he felt this affected his own motivations and strengthened his commitment to both the company and his expatriate position. Interviewee D had similar feelings towards what influenced his commitment, as he mentioned that the general support he received for him and his family was vital, especially so in the beginning. Moreover, he felt it was a strong motivator that the home company had such strong confidence in your abilities and gave you all the necessary resources to succeed. In his view, this was one of the key aspects that kept him driven and strengthened his commitment during the assignment.

*Interviewee D: 'I think it [my expatriate assignment] was very successful. It was essential that I was given all the tools needed to do a good job, and that the company gave me relatively loose reins: the sense of trust was motivating. I felt very committed to the home company, they took good care of me.'*

Contrastingly, interviewee C received quite minimal support from his home company on his assignment, due to the unfortunate fact that the factory he worked at was run down during

his expatriation. He still described his assignment as successful and felt committed to completing it: so much so, that he ended up going to China for one extra year. Interviewee C said this was largely due to other support systems he had in China, such as the strong expatriate network and all the assistance from the host company.

*Interviewee C: 'I did feel committed to the assignment. It wasn't really the organisational support, but more my own attitudes. You kind of create your own support net [...] Of course all the local expatriate networks and the host company were a huge support too.'*

One emerging theme that came up in most of the interviews was the issue of repatriation. Four of the expatriates felt that their return back to Finland was handled poorly, and that this was the biggest disappointment overall. Interestingly, only one of the interviewed expatriates currently works for the same home company as on their expatriate assignment. As an example, interviewee A said that the main problem seemed to stem from the fact that the companies were unsure where to allocate the expatriates upon their return. He mentioned that he actually ended up switching employers partially due to this. Interviewees B, C and E had similar opinions, and stated that the companies do not adequately utilise the expatriate potential upon their return. Moreover, interviewee E stated that this could make people cautious of going on assignments, due to worry that there would be nothing to return to.

*Interviewee C: 'There is a running joke among expatriates, that is very fitting. 'Expatriates are lured on assignments with limousines, but once they return, they are waste.' It takes time to re-adjust to the Finnish culture, and many companies don't know how to properly handle repatriates.'*

All in all, the key way in which organisational support seemed to facilitate expatriate commitment was that the expatriate managers felt content and supported in both daily life and at the workplace: essentially, that they did not feel left alone in a foreign country. This level of support seemed to strongly enhance their dedication in terms of the psychological contract they had with their employers, as none of them ended up leaving home prematurely, and asserted their assignments as being successful. Furthermore, it was crucial that their work was trusted and appreciated, as this enhanced both motivation for higher performance, and their commitment to deliver.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section will further discuss and summarise the major findings that arose from the expatriate interviews, presented in section 4. The three key findings will be discussed and analysed in sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.3. Section 5.2 will then go on to describe any changes made to the original theory framework based on the findings of this study. Lastly, section 5.3 will present the key recommendations for multinational companies sending expatriates on foreign assignments.

### 5.1. Overall Discussion and Analysis of Findings

The main findings of this research study were threefold. They were derived from the research questions and findings: each finding aimed to answer one specific research question. The three key findings will be analysed from the perspective of the literature review and the developed framework.

#### 5.1.1. Expatriate Adjustment is a Multifaceted Experience

One of the research questions of this study was the following: *What are the key factors that influence expatriate adjustment in expatriate managers?* Therefore, the interviews were focused on understanding the underlying factors which influence expatriate adjustment. As can be observed from the framework in Figure 6, adjustment is observed to be a two-dimensional phenomenon in the context of this research, therefore the analysis will be split into general adjustment and work adjustment.

##### *General Adjustment*

Firstly, one of the most-discussed topics in the interviews was the language spoken in the host country. The key issues with language seemed to stem from everyday interactions, such as commuting or going grocery shopping. Several interviewees described feeling quite lost-in-translation during the first months of their expatriate assignments, as the language barrier seemed impossible to overcome. One of the expatriates explained that it was highly frustrating and tiring to constantly have to stay sharp in order to understand what was going on around him. Many of the expatriates identified language as the key obstacle hindering

adjustment. These experiences are closely tied with past literature, as academics state that the language spoken in the host country can have significant impact on expatriate adjustment, especially so if a substantial language barrier exists (Selmer & Luring, 2015). Chinese is considered a highly challenging language to understand for Westerners, as it is incredibly nuanced, has a different alphabet and elements of phonetics that do not exist in European languages (ibid). Therefore, it was to be expected that the expatriates found this to be an obstacle.

Secondly, one of the key aspects that all the interviewees discussed was the impact of having their families and spouses with them on the assignment. While the experiences of their spouses and families were relatively varied, the effect of this on the expatriate manager where overwhelmingly linear. The level of happiness and adjustment that the family members felt on the assignment had an almost direct impact on the adjustment of the expatriate. Many of the expatriates even mentioned that their main goal was to ensure the well-being of their families: if they were content and supported, it would make adjustment easier for them. There also seemed to be a certain level of crossover effect between the adjustment of the expatriates and their families. One of the expatriates whose spouse had significant trouble fitting into the local society said that this impacted his mood significantly: in the end, he felt quite ready to return. On the other end of the spectrum, one expatriate whose spouse fell in love with China said it made the adjustment process a lot smoother, as you could experience things together, and perceive it as an adventure. This strong observed crossover effect while on assignment has been discussed by several academics and is partially explained by the loss of familiar support systems when abroad: such as close friends and relatives (Takeuchi et al., 2002; Harvey & Buckley, 1998). This explains why the expatriate and spouse become more dependent on one another (ibid), which may lead to exaggerated crossover effects.

Thirdly, one factor that many expatriates felt alleviated adjustment were the strong expatriate networks that were in place. Several of the expatriates felt that these were an excellent form of self-built support systems. Many of the interviewees mentioned the role of peer support in their adjustment process: it was easier to integrate, when you could share your experiences and frustrations with people in similar situations and make sense of them together. Moreover, it was a tool for sharing China-specific insight. Some expatriates mentioned that being able to speak to more experienced expatriates prior to their departure helped relieve stress and



created realistic expectations of the assignment itself. Therefore, the initial culture shock was not as severe. As discussed previously, relocating to the host country often translates to losing most of your regular support network (Harvey & Buckley, 1998). This could explain both how these expatriate networks emerged in the first place and why the expatriate managers became so dependent of them. Expatriate networks did not come up in the literature review, nor were they asked about, therefore it was interesting that this topic emerged in so many of the interviews.

Moreover, several expatriates brought up the role of forming relationships with locals. Many of the interviewees felt that the local people were keen to form relationships with them and asserted that the locals were much more open than Finns personality-wise. The Chinese people were described to be friendly, enthusiastic and loyal, once befriended. Forming relationships with locals had several benefits in terms of adjustment: it helped the expatriates gain insight on local culture and integrate better into the local society. Furthermore, many expatriates recalled that their local friends were willing to help in all practical aspects: as an example, a common need was translation help. Several academics have also discussed the role of contact with host country nationals and adjustment, stating that there is a significant correlation between adjustment and the level of contact with locals (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007). This argument seemed to be supported by the findings in this research, as the expatriates with vast networks of local friends seemed to feel more in-tune and integrated with the society.

Lastly, many expatriates mentioned the level of integration they felt towards the society as a measure of how adjusted they were to their surroundings. None of the interviewed expatriates felt integrated to the society, which was not surprising. Due to its' fierce collectivist ideals and strong favouritism towards in-group people, as opposed to out-group, the Chinese society is a challenging one to penetrate (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Hofstede, 2016). Many expatriates stated that Westerners were sometimes treated as a completely different species to the locals. They felt that the key obstacle hindering their integration were the drastic differences in cultural norms and values. As one expatriate mentioned, a 'When in Rome' strategy towards adjustment can get you far, however, when fundamental values are so far apart, there are aspects of cultural that will seem incomprehensible. Moreover, as many of the expatriates observed, they lived in a different reality than the locals, which some described as the 'expatriate bubble'. While homes in

expatriate compounds, reputable international schools and drivers made their adjustment process much more comfortable, it also isolated them from the local society.

### *Work Adjustment*

Firstly, one of the key aspects of their working life that expatriates found had an impact on their adjustment was the actual working environment. Factors that many of them mentioned in a positive light were the new job requirements, challenging work responsibilities and a highly stimulating work life, which they felt were their key motivators in terms of work adjustment. Most of the expatriates commented that they were highly driven to perform, as the dynamics at the workplace were so motivating. On the other hand, the expatriates mentioned working hectic schedules and having little to no free time, which had a somewhat hindering effect on their general adjustment. Essentially, they were so focused at work, that it was difficult to find time for other adjustment measures outside work, such as studying the language or culture. Moreover, some expatriates stated that the long work days made general adjustment challenging, as constantly learning new things was an exhausting process, and they had little energy left outside their work life. This is somewhat supported by past literature, as Selmer and Fenner (2009) contend that there are no observable spillover effects between general and work adjustment in expatriate managers.

Secondly, one aspect of that several expatriates observed to have an impact on their work adjustment was the local business culture. More specifically, a trait of the Chinese business culture that they found demanding was the local hierarchical system. From the expatriates' perspective, understanding the layers of hierarchy was somewhat of a struggle in the workplace, as in Finland, they were used to a relatively flat organisational structure. Having to respect the levels of hierarchy meant that decisions came from the top and made decision-making processes quite slow and cumbersome. In a China-specific context, this finding was relatively expected, as the high power-distance that was embedded deep into the business context could be observed from the cultural comparison in Figure 5 (Hofstede, 2016).

To continue, authority was respected to a completely different degree than in Finland, as managers were elevated to a much higher status, and boss-employee relationships were very black and white in nature. This also translated to the local employees being relatively timid to take any initiative, for fear of making mistakes. The expatriates mentioned that

subordinates had to be given highly specific instructions before they would start doing anything. Many of the expatriates also observed that the level of supervision needed was drastically different to what they were used to: in Finland, managers tend to employ a relatively laissez-faire approach. Most expatriates stated that they needed to adjust their managerial styles quite a bit in the Chinese workplace, as the local employees were quite stuck in their ways. This ties in well with what current literature has been saying, which states that Chinese employees tend to be quite uncomfortable with differing managerial styles (Jiang, 2013).

Thirdly, a factor which divided the expatriate opinion was the effect of language on work adjustment. The interviewees were largely divided in this aspect, as some found the workplace level of English to be entirely sufficient. The language issues seemed to stem mostly when communicating with production workers, as they generally did not speak English: in these instances, several expatriates mentioned using non-verbal tools or even translation help. However, on the whole, the consensus seemed to be that workplace language not a huge obstacle and very little was left unsolved due to language barriers. On the other hand, several expatriates explained that while local language skills were not vital in the workplace, it was a tool to create rapport with local colleagues through small-talk and joking around. They expressed that the locals highly appreciated even rudimentary Chinese skills. In contrast with the literature, it seemed that the language conflicts at work were not as pronounced as they used to be in the Chinese context: many academics argue that the Chinese are timid to use English for fear of making mistakes and therefore, that language is an obstacle in the work setting (Selmer, 2001; Chen and Sheer, 2003; Jiang, 2013).

One communicational difference in the workplace that most of the expatriates did identify with was the in-direct nature of communication: this seemed to have a much more pronounced effect on adjustment than language. In daily work life, this translated to meaning not being translated explicitly, an emphasised level of formality in conversation and a reluctance to discuss anything negative. The latter was a cause for annoyance for many of the expatriates, as they stated that the image of saving face was so important for the local employees, that sometimes problems would not be addressed at all. One of the expatriates mentioned that the local communication style meant a vast amount of guesswork on his part, as sometimes his subordinates would simply tell him what they thought he wanted to hear. Other expatriates had similar experiences, and voiced their frustration on the matter, as they

said it slowed processes down and could lead to nasty surprises. The issue of saving face is a Confucianist ideal and is aimed at ensuring that embarrassment or shame is not caused for any party (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen and Sheer, 2003). As Finnish communication style is highly result-driven and straightforward—even to the point of being perceived rude—this communicational conflict was somewhat expected. Furthermore, this was anticipated in the literature, as Hall (1976) highlighted that communication between high and low-context cultures could be problematic. Therefore, this element of cultural context needs to be taken into account when discussing expatriate adjustment.

Lastly, many of the expatriates were of the opinion that the key to adjustment is your own attitude and mindset. They mentioned personality attributes like open-mindedness, flexibility and being ready for new challenges as strongly correlated with success in foreign assignments. Past literature supports this finding, as academics identify openness and agreeability as key personality traits of high-performing expatriate managers (Aycan, 1997; Deardorff, 2011). One expatriate made a contrasting example, as he knew some local expatriates who were unwilling to take the time to learn the local language or customs, because they would be returning home at some point anyway. In his view, they were much more distanced from the local culture.

Moreover, several expatriates brought up the importance of humility at the workplace: by not elevating yourself onto a pedestal and working as an equal to others, you would much more likely be welcomed by the local work community. This was an interesting observation, as it conflicted somewhat with what has been said in past literature about Chinese authority. Many academics argue that Chinese employees value ranks and hierarchy in the workplace and a highly traditional boss-employee relationship; where the boss has absolute authority (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003). The key to succeeding in this type of context seems to be in finding a balance between perceived authority and humility.

Academics state that the more cultural distance there is between home and host country, the more difficulties the expatriate manager will have adjusting to the new professional environment (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000). This claim was not fully supported by the findings, as despite the expatriates observing key differences in business culture, they all adjusted to the work surroundings relatively smoothly. The expatriates did find a significant degree of unfamiliarity in the local work context, however, as many of

them worked in international teams with other expatriates, the culture had become somewhat Westernised. Therefore, the Chinese elements of business culture were slightly diluted, and potential conflict areas were not as prominent as in daily interactions with locals.

#### 5.1.2. Expatriate Commitment is a Long-Term Investment

This research study was focused on understanding the connection between expatriate commitment and expatriate adjustment; whether there is any. Therefore, this issue was discussed to some extent in the expatriate interviews. The following analysis will focus on answering the following research question: *How is expatriate adjustment linked to affective commitment to the home company?*

In the context of this research paper, affective commitment was the centre of focus. This concept is closely linked to employee behaviour and the psychological contracts that exist between employee and employer (Aycan, 1997; Torbiorn, 1982): in this context, expatriate and home company. Essentially, in theory this translates to the expatriate's need to remain dedicated to their home company.

Based on the interviews, affective commitment between expatriate and home company could be observed. All of the expatriates felt strongly committed to their home companies, mentioning aspects like being 'proud of working there', 'motivated to provide the best performance for their employer' and 'driven to achieve company targets in the host country'. Several of the expatriates also mentioned being proud of being representatives of the home company in the host country, and that it was highly motivating to see how locals valued the Western quality of work. The expatriates mentioned being driven both by inner pressure to succeed well; after being hand-picked by the company, and also by their strong commitment to their home company. This commitment to accomplish company goals and drive it forward seemed to stem largely from both elements of pride and trust: the expatriates were proud to be chosen for this type of specialty-job and were motivated by the level of trust that the home company had in their performance. As several academics argue that there is a correlation between strong expatriate commitment and high performance on assignment, these findings are somewhat corresponding to what is said in literature (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Ipe, 2010; Bhuian and Mengue, 2013).

Moreover, Caligiuri (1997) points out that as foreign assignments are highly taxing and stressful events for expatriates, they are likely to already be strongly committed to the home company prior to their departure, in order to want to take part. This argument was supported by the findings, as most of the expatriates had a long history with their home companies; some even had been on prior expatriate assignments under them, and all of them stated that they felt dedicated. As a specific example, one of the expatriates did not feel motivated to go on the offered assignment and needed quite a bit of persuasion from the Finnish end. However, the fact that he did end up going on the expatriate assignment despite his initial objections suggests a strong sense of commitment towards his home company. This further suggests that the affective commitment of employees is an important long-term goal for multinational organisations.

In terms of the link between adjustment and commitment, the findings suggest some level of correlation. As mentioned earlier, expatriate adjustment is a psychological state-of-being, therefore likely to affect expatriate behaviour and attitudes (Aycan, 1997; Torbiorn, 1982). As adjustment is also a highly subjective, the expatriates had varied experiences and responses to stimuli. There seemed to be an observable correlation between expatriate satisfaction and their adjustment to the local environment. Generally speaking, the more content the expatriates felt, the better they would adjust to surroundings; and vice versa. Furthermore, according to the findings, higher expatriate adjustment had a boosting effect on work morale and commitment to both the responsibilities of the assignment and the home company. This was supported somewhat by the literature, as Bhuian and Mengue (2013) claim that higher employee satisfaction correlates strongly with expatriate commitment in organisations.

Moreover, the linkage between expatriate commitment and adjustment seemed to also function in both ways. All of the expatriates claimed to be highly committed to the home company, but some struggled with adjustment to the local surroundings in the beginning. However, their strong dedication to both the home company and the assignment they had started seemed to impact their morale towards integrating into the new environment. As an example, one expatriate explained that the thought of returning home prematurely had crossed his mind in the beginning due to struggles with family adjustment. However, he felt strongly committed to the home company, thus was motivated to try and adjust, as he felt a

strong dedication towards completing his assignment successfully and providing the home company with the high performance they expected.

These findings also support the argument of affective commitment being measured through the level of expatriate retention. In this research context, employee retention included not losing any skilled employees to premature departure. As past literature claims, strong psychological contracts between expatriate and home company correlate with employee retention (Ayman, 1997), which is also supported by the findings of this research study. All of the interviewed expatriates felt a strong sense of commitment for both their home company and for completing the assignment to their best potential, thus none of them seriously considered departing prematurely. Interestingly however, five of the six interviewees have since changed companies, therefore long-term expatriate commitment seems to be a challenging aspect to accomplish.

Expatriate retention after repatriation seems to be an issue that is more tied with continuance commitment, as this focuses on the long-term commitment and almost obligation that employees feel towards staying with their companies. Therefore, the correlation between expatriate commitment and successful repatriation is an area worth exploring in further research. As one of the interviewees stated, ‘they were both an investment and a risk’ for the home company. This pinpoints the reason that multinational companies need to focus efforts on ensuring the successful long-term commitment of their expatriate managers.

### 5.1.3. Organisations Should Balance Support and Trust

One of the interests of this research study was to understand the role of organisational support in expatriate adjustment. The study aimed to understand how factors effecting adjustment would be impacted by various forms of organisational support, if at all. The previous section also found correlation between adjustment and affective commitment, indicating that by facilitating efficient support systems for expatriates, companies can further strengthen expatriate commitment—myriad reasons exist for multinational to ensure sufficient organisational support. Therefore, this section will discuss the third research question: *How does organisational support facilitate the relationship between expatriate adjustment and affective commitment?*

As can be observed from the theory framework developed in Figure 6, according to the literature studied, different types of organisational support seem to influence either general adjustment, work adjustment, or both. The research also takes into account that there could be spillover effects between these, which would mean that support mechanisms aimed to enhance general adjustment could influence work adjustment, and vice versa. However, these were only observed to a minimal extent in the findings. This section will be thus categorised into two: general adjustment support and work adjustment support.

### *General Adjustment Support*

One of the key forms of organisational support that the expatriates mentioned first and foremost were the general arrangements that needed to be organised for the expatriation. The overwhelming majority of the expatriates had mainly positive things to say about how these practical aspects were handled. Many of the expatriates mentioned that the move itself was handed without a hitch, and this alleviated their stress-level prior to departure quite a bit, which in itself made the initial adjustment much easier. Another beneficial experience that some of the expatriates mentioned was that the home organised a pre-departure visit for them, where they could get acquainted with the local culture and surroundings. The found this to helpful in the sense that it took a little pressure away from the initial move, as they had experienced a taste of the local surroundings beforehand, helping them understand what to expect. This ties in with Caligiuri's (2001) theory of met expectations, which asserts that being able to bridge the gap between expectations and realised experiences will ease the expatriate adjustment process.

Moreover, one form of organisational support that the expatriates found highly beneficial was family and spousal support. The expatriates recalled that all family-related arrangements were taken care of well. According to the findings, the key importance of organising general arrangements well is that the expatriates could focus specifically on the well-being of their family in the new country, alleviating potential stress and culture-shock. One specific tool that seemed prominent were the pre-departure spousal visits financed by the home company. The effect of this seemed to be twofold: it both enhanced expatriate satisfaction due to decreased levels of homesickness and was 'the best type of cultural training' for the spouses.



As mentioned in the previous section, family and spousal adjustment seemed to have a clear association with expatriate adjustment, therefore the expatriates felt that ensuring the building blocks of a good family life were there was vital. This correlates with current literature, as several academics have highlighted the impact of crossover effect between spouse and expatriate manager (Takeuchi et al., 2002; Harvey & Buckley, 1998), both in the positive and the negative. Takeuchi et al. (2002) state that poor spousal adjustment could in the worst-case scenario lead to a downward spiral for both expatriate and spouse, potentially even leading to premature departure. While none of the expatriates left prematurely, elements of negative crossover effect could be observed from the findings. On the low end, this effected expatriate morale harmfully and on the higher end, stopped them from extending their assignment contracts. This was to be expected, as several of the interviewees stated that the well-being and happiness of their family was their first priority—highlighting the importance of sufficient family support.

In terms of general support, language training was what the expatriates found the most impactful. A majority of the interviewees overwhelmingly agreed that language training was more of a necessity than a choice in the specific cultural context of China. Several of the expatriates identified the language barrier as their most significant obstacle towards adjustment, therefore found the language training to of vital importance. The findings strongly support current literature, as researchers state that in a China-specific context, without any local language skills, you will most likely not be able to adjust to the environment (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001). Only one of the interviewed expatriates opted to not study Chinese due to time management constraints and later recalled regretting this decision. As mentioned, the expatriates had highly constrained schedules, therefore several of them found allocating time for Chinese studies to be somewhat of a struggle whilst in China. This would suggest an emphasis on pre-departure training to be more ideal for expatriates, in order to mitigate congested schedules while in the host country. Current literature also supports this claim, stating than in general, expatriate managers prefer pre-departure training to other means (Degen & Lund, 2010; Selmer, 2010).

Furthermore, the expatriates largely agreed that Chinese lessons had the most impact on their general adjustment, as it made everyday life a little easier. Also, they mentioned that studying Chinese acted as a type of gateway to become more in-tune with the local culture. There seemed to also be minimal spillover into work adjustment, as some of the expatriates

mentioned using Chinese in the business setting—though this did not have a severe impact. However, some expatriates mentioned that using short phrases or joking around with local colleagues was a fantastic way to enforce relationships with locals and become more integrated into the workplace culture. Therefore, in this manner, language training also carried value outside daily life. This claim is supported by literature, as several academics assert that there is a correlation between relationships with host country nationals and smooth adjustment (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007).

In terms of limitations, one of the interviewees did mention that he was informed of his assignment quite suddenly and had limited time to prepare for it. He felt that having more notice could have enhanced his adjustment experience, as he would have had time to both mentally prepare himself and his family, and develop the necessary skills required: he mentioned language skills as an example. This, again, would suggest the benefits of allocating more of the training to be completed prior to the expatriate assignment.

#### *Work Adjustment Support*

In terms of work adjustment support, the expatriates were, again, quite happy with how the all the general arrangements were organised. Job-related aspects included aspects such as competitive salaries, work visas, and dealing with local workplace bureaucracy. Moreover, all the expatriates found their job stimulating, and were more than content with the level of responsibility they received: though this did mean that their life was relatively work-heavy. The expatriates said that as all the practical aspects were taken care of so well, they could allocate all their efforts into the job they were hired to do, which made workplace adjustment rather straightforward.

To continue, many of the expatriate mentioned host company support in a highly positive light, and said it was one of the key reasons that they did not experience a feeling of abandonment on their assignments. Several of the expatriates recalled that the local HR department was highly professional, helpful, and knowledgeable on expatriate issues: rarely there was an issue which could not be solved locally. Moreover, one of the expatriates also stated that the host company went above and beyond to make them feel welcome and included; by inviting them to local events, for example, which he felt made adjustment to the workplace community pleasant. This, again, supports the argument that engaging in

meaningful local relationships can be beneficial for building social capital – which academics argue is a key foundation aiding societal adjustment (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007).

Communication to and from the home company was a support mechanism which the expatriates were quite divided upon. Some of the expatriates were happy with the frequency of communication and felt that they were supported enough, whereas others felt that this was a major area for improvement. On average, the interviewees had communication to Finland on a daily or at the very least, weekly basis. This tended to be strictly work-related reporting. One expatriate said that he did not need frequent check-ups or ‘How are you doing’ messages.

Contrastingly, one of the expatriates felt that he was somewhat abandoned in country, and that once the move was handled, the company had simply assumed he would be fine on his own. In his opinion, this was quite demotivating, and an aspect that the company could definitely improve upon. This is also supported by current literature, as Paik et al. (2002) claim that initiation for contact should come from the home company end, and that a more intimate level of communication would be the key to enhancing expatriate workplace satisfaction and reducing any feeling of neglect. On the other hand, many expatriates felt encouraged by the level of trust that they received from their employers. Some of the interviewees stated that if the home company had been too inquisitive in terms of communication, it would have felt like they did not have faith in the expatriates’ capabilities. Many of the expatriates therefore found the relative loose reins both motivating and efficient, as decisions could be made locally. Many academics vouch for the benefits of this type of expatriate empowerment: Takeuchi et al. (2008) for example claim that the relative decision autonomy of expatriate managers has a significant and positive effect on both dimensions of adjustment and workplace morale.

One element of emerging support systems was the strong expatriate networks observed in the findings. Interestingly, the lack of familiar support systems seemed to manifest into creating close-knit foreigner networks on the assignments, which had both a professional role and a social one: there was some spillover between the two. According to the findings, several of the expatriates found these networks to be significant contributors towards their adjustment to the local community, therefore this seems to be a crucial tool that

multinationals could utilise. Some academics also introduce the idea of multinationals facilitating these types of foreigner networks by building expatriate network systems within the company: using company platforms for means of connection, for example (Boriçi & Çelepija, 2014) By leveraging the maximum benefit from these types of expatriate support systems, companies can also minimise the expatriate need for other means of support from the home company end, as a majority of the support would be shifted to the host country end.

Lastly, cross-cultural training was another element of organisational support that divided opinion. Only one of the expatriates mentioned having received this type of training. He took part in this both prior to departure and in China and had found it helpful in terms of adjusting to the local environment and understanding the complexities of local culture. Contrastingly, some of the expatriates who had not received any training stated that they do not believe it would have made a significant difference, as the move would have been a shock regardless of how well you prepare for it. One of the expatriates claimed that his extensive international background was ‘training enough’, therefore down-playing the effect of cultural training classes. Literature on the topic does partially tie in with this, stating the importance of selecting expatriates with extensive international competence and background working in foreign settings (Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Degen & Lund). However, two of the expatriates who had not received training said they would have found it to have an impact on their adjustment experience, as this would have helped them understand the context behind their day-to-day life in China. The highlighted especially the need for training while on location, as in this way, the training would be more practical and it would be easier to apply what was learnt into their current reality. Overall, this seemed to, again, be a highly subjective form of support, as the different expatriates had highly varying levels of supportive needs.

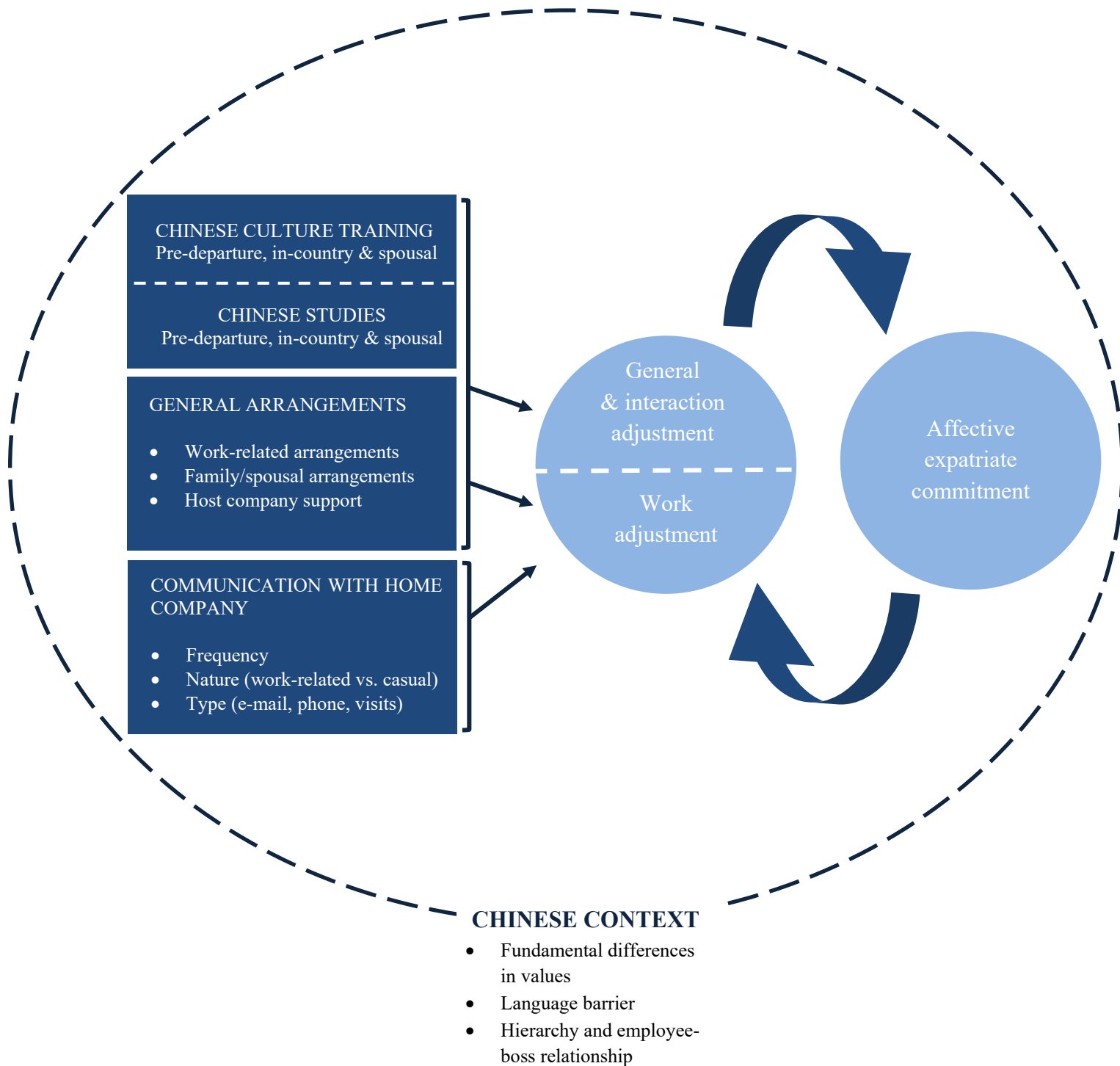
One key issue that arose from the findings concerning communication with the home company and cross-cultural training is the need to tailor support mechanisms. An important factor to keep in mind is that the level of support needed is quite subjective, therefore will most likely vary from expatriate to expatriate. For this reason, academics emphasise the need to customise training programmes according to the individual needs and capabilities of the expatriate, taking into account factors such as family situation and past international experience (Lee & Croker, 2006; Selmer, 2010; Caligiuri et. al, 2010).

## 5.2. Discussion of Framework

In terms of the framework built in section 2.5, which can be observed in Figure 6, there were some minor adjustments that could be made based on the research findings. These adjustments will be shown in Figure 9.

Firstly, the first dimension of Chinese cultural context mentioned: collectivism, was not highly evident from the findings. The expatriates did mention aspects of collectivistic culture, however, this did not seem to have heavy impact on adjustment in either direction. This element was thus replaced with the *fundamental differences in values*, as this was mentioned by many expatriates as a significant obstacle to overcome, and one of the key reasons making true integration to Chinese society highly unlikely. Moreover, *formal managerial style* was tweaked to *employee-boss relationship*, as this was a more specific description of what most expatriates struggled with.

Secondly, as was mentioned in the discussion section, the linkage between expatriate adjustment and commitment seemed to be observed both ways. As they were both tightly inter-connected, the arrow in Figure 6 could be adjusted to represent flow in both directions. Thirdly, an emerging pattern from the interviews was the importance of building relationships with locals as a mitigator for expatriate integration into the society. Black and Stephens (1989) discussed this concept in their research and distinguished this third dimension of adjustment as interaction adjustment. Several other academics have also discussed the role of social interactions as facilitators of successful adjustment (Caligiuri, 1997; Liu & Shaffer, 2004; Mäkelä, 2007). As this finding was so prominent from the research data, this third dimension of adjustment was added to the developed framework, to fully reflect the multifaceted nature of expatriate adjustment. Interaction adjustment was grouped with general adjustment for the sake of illustrating the flow from various organisational support mechanisms: interaction adjustment was, to a large extent, impacted by the same organisational support systems as general adjustment.



**Figure 9: Adjusted Theory Framework**

### 5.3. Recommendations for Multinational Companies

In terms of recommendations for multinational companies sending expatriate managers abroad, this research study identifies four key areas of recommendation. The recommendations focus on support mechanisms which aim to enhance expatriate adjustment and satisfaction on assignment, thus boosting morale and long-term commitment to the home company.

### *Time*

The first recommendation towards multinational companies is to allocate enough time for expatriate's to adequately prepare for their expatriate assignments. The expatriate selection process should be completed with this goal in mind, as it would be crucial to give expatriates at least 6 months window to prepare. Time was overwhelmingly the key factor hindering the expatriates' self-study, as their hectic work schedules made free time sparse. With more time to adequately prepare for assignments, expatriates could focus on acquiring the key skills necessary for the expatriation, such as local language abilities or cultural understanding.

Moreover, as some of the training could be shifted to the pre-departure end of the expatriation process, this would make the expatriate schedules less congested while in-country. Therefore, the expatriates could fully focus on the job they were selected to do. Furthermore, pre-departure training carries a multitude of other benefits, such as alleviating initial culture shock and enhancing the rate of adjustment to the local culture.

### *Trust*

The second recommendation for multinational companies is to continue giving relatively loose reins for expatriate managers. Many of the expatriate managers commented that the key source of their intense morale and drive at the workplace was the level of trust they received from the home company. Several expatriates mentioned their expatriate assignment as one of the high points in their careers, partially due to the stimulating environment and challenging work dynamics. They further explained that it was crucial that the company had such a strong dependence and conviction in their ability to perform as expected.

As the expatriate selection process is highly rigorous, expatriate managers usually employ characteristics of high performers, such as excellent problem-solving skills, flexibility and ability to strive in unfamiliar settings. Therefore, it is important that multinational companies find a balance between the level of support and trust they provide. Adequate support systems are important, but equally so is giving expatriate managers relative freedom to perform the job they were hired to do. In this sense, it is recommended that multinationals leverage all the local support mechanisms available, such as facilitating functional expatriate networks in the host country. Co-operation with the host company is beneficial: this ensures that

expatriate managers have localised support, but still feel that they have enough autonomy and decision-making power locally.

### *Train*

The third recommendation for multinational companies is to train expatriates adequately, to ensure they have all the tools needed to succeed on their assignments. Due to the time constraints introduced earlier, both pre-departure training and in-country training would be advisable, to ensure that enough time can be allocated. The type of training needed should be evaluated based on the following factors: cultural distance between home and host country, knowledge of the local language and the level of English spoken in the country. Typically, some element of language and cultural training is recommended, however in significantly culturally tough areas, these are a necessity.

Pre-departure cultural training would be more theoretical in nature, while in-country training would have practical elements. Furthermore, the latter could place more emphasis on business culture, as this is what the expatriate lives are centred around. In-country cultural training would be recommended to be completed a few months into the expatriate assignment, as in this way, the expatriates will have become slightly in-tune with the local culture, therefore can better apply the knowledge gained into practise. The level of language training needed varies on location, but typically no less than a few classes per week are recommended. Both of these trainings should also be extended to expatriates' spouses, as their adjustment is likely to be correlated with expatriate satisfaction due to crossover effects.

### *Tailor*

Lastly, the level of organisational support extended to expatriates should be tailored to their individual needs. Expatriate support needs are likely impacted by the following factors: past international experience, language skills, professional competence, personality and family status. As an example, an expatriate manager with extensive experience in the Chinese region would most likely find Chinese cross-cultural training to be of little benefit. Training and other means of organisational support are only useful on the dimensions that are relevant to the expatriates' adjustment. Conversation is key here: expatriate opinions and needs should be listened to, in order to allocate resources in a meaningful way.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Section 6.1. will conclude this research study by summarising the key findings and the contribution of this research. Section 6.2. will then identify and address the limitations of the research. Finally, section 6.3 will discuss potential areas for future research that arose from this research study.

### 6.1. Main Findings

There were three key contributions that arose from this research study. Firstly, one key finding from this research was the multifaceted nature of expatriate adjustment. Adjustment is both complex in terms of various dimensions, but also in terms of its subjective nature, as each expatriate perceives it differently. One key element of adjustment that arose from this study was the importance of interactional aspects in enhancing expatriate adjustment. These included elements such as family adjustment, local relationships and foreigner networks.

Secondly, another key finding from this study was that multinational companies need to balance support with trust according to the tailored needs of the expatriate manager. Essentially, this translates to organisations giving expatriate managers enough freedom and authority in the host country, but also ensure they are adequately supported with all the tools they need to be able to achieve high performance.

Thirdly, the last key finding was that expatriate adjustment and affective commitment are inter-connected in a multi-dimensional way, as both have an impact on the other. To continue, the research study highlighted the need for organisations to facilitate effective commitment in their expatriate managers, to mitigate the risk of losing highly skilled employees to premature departure.

### 6.2. Limitations of Research

Like all research, this, too, has several limitations that should be addressed. Firstly, there is a risk of bias from the researcher's perspective, as it is possible that existing opinions have had somewhat of an influence on aspects of the research. Researcher bias could impact

factors like how questions are framed, which questions are selected and how the data is interpreted and coded. Essentially, as in this context the researcher acts as a partial social constructivist, the data gathered will be somewhat subjective to personal interpretation.

To combat this, the interview questions were formulated carefully and with consideration: open-ended questions were preferred to ensure that the interview questions were not leading the interviewees in any way. Though the conversation was somewhat guided through pre-planned questions, the key focus was to remain as objective as possible and let the interviewees give their insights and tell their stories rather freely. The interviews were all recorded to ensure that information was not lost due to inadequate documentation or false memories. In the coding stage, both inductive and deductive coding methods were employed, to ensure that important emerging themes were not overlooked. Furthermore, as can be observed from Figure 8, the coding process was done meticulously. The literature review was read through several times, and the codes and themes were re-evaluated and adjusted halfway through the coding process, to ensure that they were linked to the key research and literature.

To continue, when conducting interviews, there exists a risk of bias from the interviewee perspective. Interviewees could give distorted information due to several reasons: protecting the image of their home company or remembering things inaccurately, to name a few examples. As mentioned earlier, due to convenience sampling, the expatriates selected for this research had all returned to Finland already. Retrospective information always carries certain risks, as information can be distorted over time. As one of the expatriates stated in his interview, 'Memories grow sweeter with time'. To mitigate this problem, all expatriates selected for the interviews were informed ahead of time about potential topics that would be discussed, so they could come to the interviews somewhat mentally prepared. Some of the interviewees had also made notes prior to the interviews on their expatriate assignments, in case they needed to jog their memory.

Furthermore, when discussing things like expatriation, the experience is usually highly subjective, which makes generalisation of the data somewhat challenging. Especially negative experiences can distort memories and even create false ones, as Brainerd et al. (2008) state, therefore expatriates could have highly varied responses and recollections from similar situations. As the Chinese society is culturally tough to penetrate from a foreigner's

perspective (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Selmer, 2001; Chen & Sheer, 2003; Hofstede, 2016), the expatriates interviewed had some rather intense experiences, which could have influenced their answers somewhat.

Unfortunately, the subjectivity of information is a problem that persists when collecting data in the form of qualitative interviews. However, it remains the most appropriate tool to gain in-depth insights and personal experiences from expatriates, which aid in understanding their adjustment process and commitment to the home company. Also, as the interviewees have already returned to their country of origin when interviewed, it is likely that they would have a more neutral approach to their experiences, as they would have had some time to mull them over.

Moreover, the demographics and sample size of the interviewees were somewhat limited due to time and availability constraints. Utilising snowball sampling in the essence of convenience could have somewhat limited the diversity of candidates. Hand-picking the interviewee candidates could have been more beneficial if limited resources and access were not issues. However, in the context of this research paper, snowball sampling remained the most ideal tool that could reach a board network of suitable candidates quickly.

Lastly, as the interviewees were conducted in Finnish, there is a slight risk of information being lost in translation. This was mitigated by recording all interviewees and documenting them only after the interviews were conducted, to ensure that the information was as accurate as possible. Furthermore, arguably a higher risk of information loss would occur if the interviews were conducted in English, as the interviewees were all more inclined to speak in their mother-tongue. As Welch and Piekkari (2006) state in their research, interviewing in a shared native language is likely to have a positive impact on rapport-building with interviewee and interviewer, thus enhancing their eagerness to share insights. This enhanced not only the quality of the information, but the depth of the conversations.

### 6.3. Suggestions for Further Research

Firstly, in terms of further research, an interesting emerging theme that came up in most of the expatriate interviews was employee retention after repatriation. Several of the expatriates mentioned that the way companies treat their repatriating expatriate managers is one of the

key obstacles hindering successful expatriation rates. As this seems to be linked to continuance commitment, the connection between commitment and employee retention after repatriation would be a fascinating point of future research.

Secondly, another point of research could be to study the impact of a specific set of organisational support mechanisms on expatriate adjustment. As an example, work-related support systems could be focused on specifically. It would also be interesting to see whether there are observable spillover effects from work-related support tools towards non-work adjustment, and vice versa.

Thirdly, this research study could be approached from a different case study perspective. It would be interesting to see how nationality and the location of the host country plays a part in various dimensions of expatriate adjustment. As Finland is perceived as a relatively novel culture, one fascinating case study would be to observe foreign expatriate managers relocating to Finland. Furthermore, it could be beneficial to compare the adjustment of several nationalities of expatriates in a certain location, to see the impact of nationality when other factors are constant.

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## INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic pre-interview questions asked via e-mail:

- Age
- Family status
- Industry/professional area of work
- Previous international experience

The tentative interview questions are listed below. As the interviews were semi-structured, the potential discussions points are listed below the questions. The interview was structured in a way which gave the interviewees relative freedom to speak about what they felt was important or impactful to them.

1. How did you initially react to being offered the assignment?

- Motivations to go on assignment
- Expectations prior to the assignment
- Help/support received prior to the assignment

2. Could you please tell me briefly about your expatriate assignment?

- Details on assignment duration and location
- Initial reactions to new settings
- Potential culture shock
- Adjustment and settling in

3. Could you please discuss a little about how you adjusted to the new culture in terms of your daily life?

- Cultural clashes in everyday life
- Communication barriers
- Spousal/family adjustment

4. Could you please discuss a little about how you adjusted to the new work setting?

- New work requirements/challenges in the workplace
- Hierarchy/managerial style
- Workplace communication

5. How did your home company aid you in settling in? Do you feel it was sufficient? If not, what kind of support would you have wanted specifically?

- Cross-cultural training
- Language training
- Communication
- Practical aspects of assignment

6. After settling in, did you feel comfortable and adjusted to your new surroundings? How so?

- Key issues hindering adjustment
- Aspects helping adjustment

7. Did you feel a sense of commitment towards your home company?

- Company support and relationship (home vs. host organisation)
- Regular contact
- Motivation to perform well
- Changes throughout the assignment

8. Would you describe your expatriate experience as successful? How do you see the role of your home organisation in this?

9. Did you at any point consider going home prematurely? Did you feel a sense of commitment towards completing the assignment?

10. How did you feel about the Chinese culture and Chinese surroundings in general?

- Chinese people and society
- Weather, location
- Anything that was especially impactful/challenging/helpful

## HAASTATTELURUNKO

Demografiset taustakysymykset, jotka kysytty etukäteen meilitse:

- Ikä
- Perhetausta
- Teollisuuden ala/työtehtävät
- Aikaisempi kansainvälinen kokemus

Kaikki haastattelut olivat puolistrukturoituja: haastattelujen rakenne perustui etukäteen mietittyyn haastattelupohjaan, jonka teemoista keskusteltiin vapaamuotoisesti. Mahdolliset keskusteluaiheet on listattu kysymysten alle. Haastattelukysymykset olivat rakenneltu siten, että haastateltavat saivat puhua melko vapaasti aiheista, jotka tuntuivat heille tärkeiltä.

1. Kuinka reagoit alun perin, kun sinua pyydettiin komennukselle?

- Motivaatiot lähteä komennukselle
- Odotukset ennen komennusta

2. Voisitko kertoa vähän komennuksestasi vapaamuotoisesti?

- Kohdekaupunki/komennuksen kesto
- Ensireaktiot ja sopeutuminen uuteen ympäristöön

3. Kuinka sopeuduit jokapäiväiseen elämään Kiinassa?

- Kulttuuriset ristiriidat
- Kommunikatio-ongelmat
- Perheen/puolison sopeutuminen

4. Kuinka sopeuduit uuteen työympäristöön?

- Uudet työvaatimukset/haasteet yrityskulttuurin kanssa
- Hierarkia/johtamistyyli
- Kommunikatio työpaikalla

5. Kuinka kotiyritys auttoi sinua sopeutumaan? Tuntuiko tämä riittävältä? Jos ei, minkälaista tukea olisit kaivannut?

- Kulttuurikoulutus
- Kieliopinnot
- Kommunikatio
- Käytännön asiat

6. Kun olit asettunut, tunsitko kuuluvasi kiinalaiseen yhteiskuntaan?

- Mitkä tekijät hidastivat sopeutumista?
- Mitkä edesauttoivat sopeutumista?

7. Tunsitko olevasi sitoutunut kotiyritykseen?

- Yritykseltä saatu tuki/apu (koti vs. isäntäyritys)
- Kommunikaatio kotiyritykseen
- Motivaatio suoritua hyvin
- Mahdolliset muutokset komennuksen aikana

8. Harkitsitko missään vaiheessa palaamista etukäteen? Koitko olevasi sitoutunut komennuksen loppuun suorittamiseen?

9. Oliko komennuksesi mielestäsi onnistunut? Miten kotiyrityksesi toiminta vaikutti tähän?

10. Mitä mieltä olet kiinalaisesta kulttuurista ja Kiinasta asuinmaana yleisesti?

- Kiinalaiset ihmiset ja yhteiskunta
- Keli, ympäristö, asuinmaa
- Asioita/tilanteita jotka olisivat erityisesti jäänyt mieleen haastavana/mielenkiintoisena

## EXAMPLE INTERVIEW

*Kuinka reagoit alun perin, kun sinut pyydetiin komennukselle?*

Se oli tosi mielenkiintoinen, kuulosti tosi mielenkiintoiselta vaihtoehdolta. Positiivinen, hyvin positiivinen.

*Minkälaisia motivaatioita sinulla oli lähteä komennukselle?*

Siinä oli tosi kiinnostavaa se, että se oli uusi investointi, täysin uusi tehdas. Tuntui että kerrankin pääsi siihen hommaan ihan alusta asti. Ja se oli tietysti myös perheelle hieno mahdollisuus. Vaikutti oikein mielenkiintoiselta! Aasiassa ei kuitenkaan koskaan ennen kauheasti tullut oltua.

*Minkälaista tukea tai apua sait yritykseltä ennen komennusta?*

Erittäin hyvää tukea. Siellä oli paljon... yrityksellä oli paljon kokemusta ekspattien lähettämisestä maailmalle. Yhtiöstä oli lähetetty ihmisiä aikaisemminkin Kiinaan ja muihin Aasian maihin. HR oli hyvin valveutunut siihen ja hoiti käytännön asioita hyvin paljon. Järjesti muun muassa sellaisen Kiinan kulttuuri -valmennuksen Suomessa etukäteen sekä itselleni että vaimolleni ja järjesti myös tutustumiskäynnin maahan. Että minun mielestä hoitivat hyvin sitä asiaa.

*Sanoisitko, että käytännön asiat olivat hyvin järjestetty?*

Käytännön asiat oli todella hyvin järjestetty. Asuntoasiat, lasten koulu oli järjestetty, ne palkkasi myös sinne konsultin joka hoiti Kiinan verotukseen ja muuhun sellaiseen liittyviä asioita. Sanoisin että erittäin hyvin oli järjestetty. Muutosta lähtien kaikki oli hoidettu hyvin niin ettei itse tarvinnut stressata asioita kovinkaan paljon. Firma auttoi kaikissa asioissa silleen että saatiin kaikki sujuvasti hoidettua.

*Voisitko kertoa vähän komennuksestasi vapaamuotoisesti?*

Lähdin Kiinaan marraskuussa, tehdas- ja laiteasennukset oli loppusuoralla. Tehdasrakennus oli valmistumaisillaan. Pääsin ottamaan niitä vastaan ja tutustumaan urakoitsijoihin, siihen projektiporukaan. Sitten kun olin siellä niin projektia ruvettiin ajamaan alas ja tehdasta ruvettiin ottamaan käyttöön. Olin mukana myös henkilöstön rekrytoinnissa ja koulutuksessa, tai valmennuksessa. Myös ihan jaoin siellä kuka sai minkäkin työhuoneen, ja organisoitiin kuka tekee mitäkin ja kuka raportoi kellekin. Käytännössä ihan tehtiin nollasta kaikki järjestelmät. Sitten ihan tällaiset palaverikäytännöt aloitettiin ja koneita ruvettiin koeajamaan ja otettiin käyttöön.

Päivät oli todella pitkiä. Silloin talvella kun aloitettiin niin pitkiä päiviä kyllä tehtiin. Matka oli pitkä Shanghaista Changshuun, tultiin melkein tunnin, tai puolentoista tunnin matka. Käytännössä lähdettiin aamulla kello seitsemän, jopa ennen seitsemää ja oltiin illalla puol seitsemän, seitsemän aikoihin perillä. Mentiin johonkin syömään ja sitten kämpille suoraan nukkumaan. Eli oli aika tiivistä se projektiaika.

Sitten se oli siinä mielessä aika haasteellista että sinne oli tietysti palkattu ihmisiä, kourallinen ihmisiä tuli sieltä vanhemmalta tehtaalta, eli niin sanottua kokenutta porukkaa

oli joitain kymmeniä. Pari kolmekymmentä ehkä. Mutta loppu oli ns. pystymetsästä nostettu, eli ihmisiä joilla ei ollut minkään valtakunnan teollista kokemusta. Piti valmentaa melkein niin kuin lapsia. Eli ei oikein tiennyt miten tehtaalla ollaan, ihan henkilökohtaisesta suojaamisesta ja työmenetelmistä lähtien. Tietenkin kun ei ollut kokemusta niin ei voinut vaatia. Eli lähetettiin siinä suhteesta ihan nollostä. Ja se alku vaikutti kyllä aika epätoivoiselta, että tuleeko tästä hommasta mitään. Hirveen nopeasti se porukka siinä kuitenkin sitten oppi. Kävi myös niin kuin tyypillisesti, että ekan vuoden aikana 30% vaihtui. Heti kun voi sanoa että on ollut länsimaisessa tehtaassa töissä, niin heidän arvohan kasvaa, ja he lähtivät sitten heti parempiin hommiin.

Sitten oli aika paljon sellaista omaa opiskelua, että sitä kiinan kieltä olisi edes jotenkin osannut ja siellä pärjännyt. Läheskään kaikki ei siellä englantia puhunut. Toimihenkilöt kaikki jonkun verran, mutta niistäkin osa aika huonosti. Ja sitten oli sitä kiinalaisen kulttuurin oppimista: miten siellä maassa touhutaan, miten hommat toimii, miten sitä verkostoa luodaan ja miten asiat lähtee sujumaan. Ja lähtihän ne siinä sitten! Että me tehtiin ... kun marraskuun aikana sinne muistaakseni menin ja me tehtiin ensimmäiset asiakastoimitukset taisi olla tammikuun puolta väliä. Voin sanoa että kesäkuussa oli hommat sitten jo täydellä, täydellä mallilla. Ajettiin ihan oikeata tuotantoa ja varsin mittavia määriä. Tehtaan avajaiset oli... taidettiin pitää kahdetkin eri avajaiset. Yksi oli yhteistyökumppaneille ja yksi sitten poliitikoille ja muille. Taisi olla maaliskuussa toinen ja huhtikuussa toinen. Semmoista.

*En ole varma mainitsiko tätä, mutta kuinka kauan komennus kesti kokonaisuudessaan?*

Mitä se nyt oli, 2 vuotta seitsemän kuukautta.

*Ja kaupunki oli siis Changshu?*

Joo, kyllä. Shanghaista matkustettiin aina.

*Joo. Puhuitkin vähän tuosta työympäristöstä, niin kuinka koit sopeutuneesi uuteen työympäristöön?*

Tosi, tosi hyvin. Tosi hyvin. Sitä lähdettiin vähän sellaisella asenteella, että nyt mä tulen olemaan sellaisissa hommissa jotka ei ole samanlaisia kun ennen. Sitten kun niihin ihmisiin tutustui, niin kyllä se tosi nopeasti siitä lähti menee. Ja voin sanoa, että kyllä ihmeen nopeasti siihen sopeutui.

*Tuota, oliko sinulla mitään haasteita yrityskulttuurin kanssa?*

Oli joo.

*Tulisiko mieleen mitään tiettyjä tilanteita, tai..?*

No ensinäkin kiinan kielihän oli hirveen vaikeeta, se kun ne ei puhunut englantia niin kyllä se kommunikointi oli todella hankalaa alkuun. Mutta sitten oppi jotenkin pärjäämään. Tiesi miten asiat saa selitettyä ja miten pääsee eteenpäin. Ja sitten iso osa oli tietysti se työkulttuuri: kiinalainenhan tekee mitä käsketään. Ja jos ei käsketä, ei tee mitään. Mutta sitten toisaalta he tekevät töitä kauhean ahkerasti. Että, että... pomo on sellainen joka oletetaan kertovan mitä tapahtuu. Pomon oletetaan olevan vihainen jos hommat ei mene



hyvin. Se oli sellaista hyvin, hyvin mustavalkoista. Hommat tehdään, ne alkaa välittömästi – se oli oikein sellainen kunnia-asia että työt alkoi heti. Vaikka tehtäisiin väärinkin hommia, niin työt alkoi heti. Kaikki yritettiin aloittaa mahdollisimman nopeasti. Ja oikein mitään hommaa ei niinkun, oikein suunniteltu niin että mitä tehdään ensi viikolla, vaan suunniteltiin vaan mitä tehdään nyt. Kaikki tehtiin tässä ja nyt. Ja se siinä oikeastaan pikkasen häiritsi, sillä siellä oli monet asiat sellaisia joita olisi pitänyt vähän niin kuin suunnitella ja miettiä, ja vähän tehdä pitkäjänteisimpiä suunnitelmia. Vähän sellaisia tavoitteellisimpia juttuja.

Ja sitten kiinalainen keskijohto, sanotaan että työnjohtajat ja päälliköt joita oli siellä alaisina, niin oli hirveän vaikea joskus tietää mitä siellä todella tapahtuu. Koska kiinalainenhan kertoo pomolleen sen mitä pomo haluaa kuulla. Ei ne suoranaisesti valehtelee, mutta ne on silleen, että ne vähän niin kuin menettää kasvonsa jos ne sanoo suoraan että ”hei, toi homma nyt sössittiin, nyt meni päin mäntyä”. Että ne viimeiseen asti pyrkii sitä välttämään. Ne koitti sitten itse fiksailla sitä hommaa, ettei pomo huomaisi.

Ja alussa varsinkin oli vähän haastavaa kun siellä oli kokematon porukkaa niin paljon, ja tietysti itse oli kokematon toimimaan kiinalaisessa kulttuurissa. Alussa mulla oli melkein hälytys kännykässä tunnin välein (nauraa), että muisti käydä tehtaalla katsomassa mitä tapahtuu. Siellä piti olla melkein kokoajan, ettei hölmöillä mitään. Varsinkin alussa, kun tuntui että siellä tehtiin niin älyttömiä hommia jos ei vahtinut. Piti ihan kädestä pitäen kouluttaa sitä porukkaa: miten koneet ajetaan, miten tehtaalla toimitaan, miten työkaluja käytetään, miten paikat pidetään siistinä, miten pukeudutaan, miten ajetaan trukilla, missä tavarat varastoidaan, miltä tehtaan pitää näyttää... kaikkea sellaista! Että se oli helposti alussa sellaista älämölöä ja kauheata melskausta... sekasortoa, jos ei ollut vahtimassa. Sitten tietenkin kun pomo näkyi tehtaalla, niin hommat sujui paremmin, heti skarpattiin. Semmoista se oli kaikki.

*Oliko johtamistyyli erilainen kun mihin olit Suomessa tottunut?*

Kyllä, kyllä. Siellä piti hyvin selkeästi sanoa mitä halusi tapahtuvan. Että jos sanoi että ”menkää pojat ja katsokaa mitä tehdään, saatte itse päättää”, niin se ei päättynyt koskaan hyvin. Ne ei uskaltanut tehdä kun pelkäsi tehdä päätöksiä, ja tuota... siinä alussa varsinkin, ei myöskin oikein tiennyt mitä tehdä.

*Okei, kun puhuit noista kommunikaatio-ongelmista vähän, niin tulisiko mieleen mitään muita sellaisia jokapäiväisiä tilanteita joissa tuli se kulttuuriero vastaan?*

No kyllä se kulttuuriero tuli nimenomaan, nimenomaan tuossa. Koska Suomessa kuitenkin odotetaan että työntekijät ja varsinkin toimihenkilöt ottaa itse sitä vastuuta, eikä tule kokoajan kysymään mitä pitää tehdä. Uskaltavat tehdä päätöksiä. Niin kiinalaiset ei oikein uskalla – he haluaa, että pomo sanoo mitä pitää tehdä. Ja sitten kun pomo sanoo, niin sitten tehdään. Ei katsota kelloa tai työmäärää, he ovat valmiita tekemään mitä vaan. Se on mun mielestä suurin ero siinä, että siellä oletetaan että esimies sanoo aina mitä pitää tehdä. Ja toinen ... tai oikeastaan jo kolmas merkittävä ero Suomeen on se että siellä arvostetaan hirveästi sitä että näkyy ja tapahtuu. Toimitaan, ruvetaan välittömästi hommiin jos joku homma on pielessä. Sille tehdään heti jotain. Siinä ajattelutavassa me suomalaiset hävitään, eli kiinalainen ajattelee niin, että sen pitää olla heti. Se näkyi kaikessa. Eli jos sinulla on oikeat suunnitelmat, oikeat työkalut, oikeat kaverit tekemään niin silloin kyllä kiinalainen voittaa heti, sillä niillä on myös se tavoite että hommat pitää olla nopeasti valmiit.

*Tulisiko sinulla mitään konfliktitilanteita mieleen työelämän ulkopuolelta? Eli ihan arjessa?*

No joo. Aina ei voinut oikein luottaa heihin. Jos piti vaikka kämppää laittaa tai jotain muita juttuja, niin eihän se aina mennyt niin kuin sovittiin. Jos piti olla johonkin aikaan jossain niin eihän se siellä ollut – joskus samana päivänäkään. Jos piti tuoda joku toimiva laite niin eihän se silloin toiminut. Porukkaa on tietysti niin paljon ja erilaista yrittäjää niin kyllähän siellä aika helposti, varsinkin länsimaalaista yritettiin vähän kusettaa. Semmoista oli aika paljon. Siihen törmättiin töissäkin, jos oli laitteita jotka ei ollut ollenkaan speksien mukaisia ja sitten kun yritettiin uhata takuulla ja käydä neuvotteluja niin sieltä vaan seliteltiin. Yritettiin vaikka mitä tuputtaa ja sönköttää. Oli pari sellaista riitatilannetta jossa Suomessa oltaisiin melkein menty raastupaan, mutta siellä vaan naureskeltiin. Saatiin ne kuitenkin kuntoon. Siellä on todella hyviä firmoja ja tosi hyviä urakoitsijoita, mutta sitten on myös ääripäitä. Huijarifirmoja oli pilvin pimein. Sellaista kaikkea.

*Entä miten perheesi sopeutui Kiinaan? Ja uuteen kulttuuriin?*

Kyllä kai aika hyvin. Alkuunhan sen oli varmaan aika mysteeri kun se ilmasto oli ihan erilainen. Kauhea helle oli kun perhe saapui. Aikamoinen sopeutuminen oli uuteen kouluun – vaikka lapset kävi kansainvälistä koulua, niin oli aika sopeutuminen. Autonkuljettaja vei ja kodinhoitaja laittoi ruokaa, niin olihan se todella erikoista. Vaimollekin oli vähän sopeutumista, että mikä hänen roolinsa on tässä kaikessa. Mutta siitähän se kaikki sitten lähti rullaamaan. Ei siihen loppujen lopuksi kai kauhean kauan mennyt.

*Kuinka kotiyritys auttoi sinua sopeutumaan?*

Tosi hyvin. Ne auttoi kyllä kaikessa. Mulla kävi itseasiassa sellainen ”accident” alussa, meni Akillesjänne ja se leikattiin siellä paikallisessa sairaalassa. Silloin firma auttoi tosi paljon, järjesti silloin muun muassa lennon vaimolle sinne, että pääsi vähän auttamaan. Hyvin monessa asiassa ne sitten auttoi. Kaikissa verotuskuvioissa ja hallinnollisissa kuvioissa, kyllä kotimaassa kun otti yhteyttä HR:ään niin kyllä kaikessa auttoi ja oli todella hyvin perillä kaikesta.

*Oliko sinulla siis säännöllinen kommunikointi kotiyrityksen kanssa?*

Oli joo. Oli. Eipä sitä toisaalta niin paljon tarvinnut sitten kunhan alkuun pääsi ja homma rupesi sujumaan. Mutta siellä oli kyllä ihmisiä jotka osasivat aina auttaa.

*Minkälaista muuta tukea sait kotiyritykseltä?*

Saatiin vaimon kanssa molemmat kulttuurikoulutusta ennen komennusta. Oli sellainen päivän juttu Tampereella. Ja sitten siellä olin sellaisella ”How to be an expatriate in China” -kurssilla. Oli sellainen viikon, melkein viikon koulutuspaketti siellä paikallisella yliopistolla.

*No miten tämä tuki jonka sait yritykseltä, tuntuiko se riittävältä?*

Se oli hyvä joo. Nehän maksoi myös kiinan opinnot. Opiskelin sitä kiinaa kuitenkin kerran, kaksi viikossa ja ihan henkilökohtaisella opettajalla. Se oli mielestäni myös aika iso panostus. Ja vaimonihan sai myös kiinan opintoja. Firma maksoi nekin.

*Okei. Sitten kun olit asettunut maahan, niin tunsitko kuuluvasi kiinalaiseen yhteiskuntaan?*

No kyllähän siellä länsimaalainen on siellä aina sellainen jota katsotaan vähän eri lailla. Nehän kutsuikin meitä *lao wan:iksi* eli iso nenä vai miten se nyt kääntyy suomeksi. Kyllähän sitä kaikessa oli vähän eri kastia siellä. Kyllä luulen että integroituminen siihen yhteiskuntaan kestäisi, että kyllä siellä aika kauan saisi olla. Mutta kun aikansa siellä oli niin kyllähän sitä oppi pärjäämään. Kyllä siellä pärjäsikin kaupoissa ja takseissa, kaiken näköisiä hommia osasi siellä kyllä tehdä... ei se nyt sen kummempaa ollut. Mutta kyllä sitä aina näki kun länsimaalainen tuli johonkin, niin kohdeltiin erilailla. Varsinkin jos menet muihin paikkoihin kuin joku Shanghai, joka on kuitenkin aika kansainvälinen. Se oli iso ero miten eri tavalla sua kohdeltiin kun menit johonkin umpikiinalaiseen firmaan, joissa mekin käytiin paljon kun käytiin asiakkaiden luona.

*Mitkä on sellaiset tekijät, jotka edesauttoi sitä sopeutumisprosessia? Tuleeko mitään tiettyä mieleen?*

Kyllä se oli kuitenkin se valmennus siellä ja se ennakkokäynti siellä, jossa oli myös perhe mukana. Silloin kun käytiin siellä katsomassa asuntoja, se asunnonhankinta ja koulujen hankinta, kaikki tällainen oli hirveän hyvin hoidettu. Se kaikki kyllä edesauttoi. Ja sitten kuitenkin se mikä oli ehkä oleellisinta oli se, että siellä oli ollut ekspatteja aiemminkin. Että siitä oli kokemusta. Sekä sillä organisaatiolla, että sitten Suomen päässä. Että siitä oli pitkä kokemus.

*Entä tuleeko mieleen mitään erityisiä tekijöitä, jotka olisivat hidastaneet sitä sopeutumista?*

No... sopeutumisesta nyt ehkä ei. Tai alkuun oli tosiaan sen kiinan kielen kanssa haasteita. Se oli alkuun ehkä kaikkein vaikeinta. Toki siellä tehtaalla oli hyvinkin vaikeita teknisiä ongelmia joita kieltämättä ehkä ei olisi osannut ratkaista, jos ei olisi ollut ekspatti, sillä sitä verkostoa sitten oli... osasi siis etsiä sitä apua muualtakin. Mutta varsinaisia ”show-stoppereita” ei kyllä sopeutumismielessä hirveästi ollut. Ei mulla nyt ainakaan tule mieleen mitään.

*Okei. Entä tunsitko olevasi sitoutunut kotiyritykseen?*

Kyllä. Joo.

*Kerroit aiemmin saaneesi hyvin tukea kotiyritykseltä. Entä sitten siellä Kiinassa, saitko isäntäyritykseltä minkälaista tukea?*

No hyvin ne jeesasi kaikessa. Meillehän järjestettiin kaikki, ei tarvinnut melkein kun sormia napsauttaa. Oli vahvasti kyllä resursoittu tehtaaseen väki. Vähänkin jos jotain tarvitsi, niin he kyllä heti jeesasi. Erittäin hyvin hoidettu. Siinä mielessä erilaista, että oli suomalaisvetoinen yritys. Eli ei menty kiinalaiseen firmaan, vaan suomalaiseen firmaan.

*Olitko tyytyväinen siihen miten kotiyritys hoiti kaiken?*

Kyllä.

*Huomasitko minkäänlaisia muutoksia tässä asenteessa, tai fiiliksissä komennuksen aikana?*

No kyllä joo. Alkuun vähän hermostutti kiinalaiset työntekijät, kun tuntui ettei mitään tee muuta kuin sählää ja möhlää ja juoruilee. Mutta sitten kun oppi arvostamaan miten he tekee asioita ja sitä miten ne tsemppasi, ja miten todella nopeasti ne oppi asioita. Jotenkin siinä se omakin fiilis kasvoi, kun tajusi että tämä porukka on ihan osaavaa jengiä ja osaa kyllä hommat, kun vaan annetaan aikaa ja mahdollisuuksia oppia. Tietysti kun oli aina ollut sellaisessa firmoissa töissä missä oli hyvin, hyvin kokenut organisaatio, niin oli tottunut ehkä vähän liiankin vahvaan toimintaan. Tuolla tosiaan oli ihmisiä, jotka aloitteli vasta niitä hommia. Siihen nähden ne kyllä oppi tosi nopeasti. He oli kauhean halukkaita oppimaan, koki sen oikein pääomaksi että ne saa kokemusta ja osaamista, ja varsinkin että saavat olla länsimaalaisessa firmassa opissa. Siellä oli muun muassa hirveän iso status se että oli länsimaalainen esimies.

Siellä oli yksikin nuori kaveri joka tuli työturvallisuuspäällikköksi, niin tota, se oli ihan ummikko, ressurssi ei puhunut englantia juuri lainkaan, eikä oikein tiennyt mitä tehdä. Sitten kun sitä opastettiin että näin nämä hommat menee, ja puhuin sille aina englantia... sovittiin että joka päivä pidetään sellainen pieni sessio. Niin sehän puhui jo vuoden päästä tosi hyvää englantia, ja ne hommat sujui tosi hyvin. Sehän valitettavasti kahden vuoden päästä lähti jo firmasta, kun oli jo sen pääoman jo kasvattanut. Sillä oli sitten jo markkina-arvoa. Sehän on tietysti vaarana aina. Mutta joka tapauksessa oli ilo nähdä että porukka oppi ja halusi oppia. Oppimiskäyrä oli kyllä paljon nopeampi kun mihin Suomessa on tottunut.

*Harkitsitko missään vaiheessa palaamista kotiin etukäteen?*

En... en.

*Koitko olevasi sitoutunut komennuksen loppuun suorittamiseen?*

Kyllä.

*Oliko komennuksesi mielestäsi onnistunut?*

Oli, hyvin onnistunut.

*Osaatko sanoa miten kotiyriksen toiminta vaikutti tähän... että tuntui näin onnistuneelta?*

No se kotiyritys, ne tuntui hyvin hoitavan kaiken. Kyllä se vaikutti. Paluu oli huonosti järjestetty. Siinä tota, siinä firmassa niin kuin muissakin, se mihin ekspattikomennukset usein kaatuu on että ei oikein tiedetä mihin ne ihmiset laitetaan kun he palaa. Minäkin sitten loppupeleissä vaihdoin työnantajaa, ehkä osittain sen takia. Mutta se siinä usein on sitten se, se juttu. Mitäs sä kysytkään? (nauraa)

*Sitä, miten kotiyriksen toiminta vaikutti siihen, että pidit komennustasi niin onnistuneena?*

Se vaikutti hyvin paljon. Kotiyritys hoiti asiat hyvin. Ei siitä oltaisi suoriuduttu niin hyvin, jos kotiyritys ei olisi ollut niin perillä asioista ja hoitanut hommia hyvin alusta lähtien.

*Tuleeko mieleen mitään asioita, jossa he olisivat voineet parantaa? Koitko saavasi kaiken tarvitseman?*

No aina voi parantaa. Toki se perehdytyskoulutus olisi voinut olla pidempi, ja olisin voinut opiskella kiinaa etukäteen. Kaikkea tällaista. Toisaalta täytyy muistaa se että itselläkin oli aika rajallisesti aikaa siinä ennen lähtöä. Kaiken voi tehdä paremmin, mutta en koe että siitä mitään erityistä olisi puuttunut.

*Tähän loppuun haluaisin vielä kysyä ihan yleisesti että mitä mieltä olet kiinan kulttuurista ja Kiinasta asuinmaana?*

Oli tosi mielenkiintoista, oppi kyllä arvostamaan. Sai kyllä perspektiiviä siihen miten paljon, paljon vanhempi ja rikkaampi kulttuuri se on kuin esimerkiksi Suomi. Suomessa usein tiedetään kaikki eikä ymmärretäkään, miten vähän tiedetään. Vanhalla maalla on pitkät, pitkät perinteet ja valtavan hienoa, vanhaa kulttuuria. Se oli kyllä jotenkin tosi hienoa oivaltaa. Se täytyy kyllä tietysti sanoa että suomalainen tietotaito on kapea monessa suhteessa, mutta aika syvä. Esimerkiksi niistä tuotteista, siitä tekniikasta jota sinne vietiin, niin kyllä ne oli tosi pitkälle viety. Että varmasti tehtiin suomalaisin voimin paras tehdas joka Kiinassa on niille tuotteille. Pitäisi sitä kyllä puolin ja toisin arvostamaa. Ei suomalaisilla ole paljoakaan neuvottavaa heille – ehkä siinä tekniikassa ja jossain tällaisessa. Mutta kyllä siinä kulttuurissa on moni asia hyvin.

*Entä kiinalaiset ihmiset? Koitko saavasi paljon paikallisia ystäviä?*

Sain. Loppupeleissä kun oppi tuntemaan koko tehtaan väen vähintäänkin ulkonäöltä, ja iso osa niistä oli tosi hyviä kavereita. Päivät oli välillä kyllä tosi hauskoja. Vaikka oli paljon töitä ja vaikeita hommia... välillä oli vaikka minkälaista kriisiä, niin oli kyllä hyvä porukka. He on kauhean ystävällisiä ja mukavia, ja jotenkin tosi innostuneita kaikesta. On kaikessa mielellään mukana. Uteliaitahan ne on ja tunkee joka paikkaan (nauraa), mutta sekin johtuu varmaan siitä että haluaisi olla mukana kaikessa. Suomessa työpaikalla on jotenkin tottunut siihen että kaikki menee koppeihinsa nyhäämään, niin kiinalaiset on kauhean avoimia ja innostuneita, ja kaikessa mielellään mukana. Että kyllä tuli erittäin hyviä ystäviä siellä, ja se oli hienoa huomata että vaikka tuli tosi erilaisista lähtökohdista, niin ei se ollut mikään este.

*Entä jos mietit ympäristöä ja Kiinaa ihan asuinmaana, miltä se tuntui asuinpaikkana?*

Shanghaihan oli tosi hieno asuinpaikka. Sehän on Kiinan länsimaalaisin kaupunki ja miljoonakaupunkina siellä oli varmasti kaikki mitä missään suurkaupungissa olisi. Ja... sehän siinä varmaan olikin aika hyvä houkutin. Shanghaissahan on melko helppo länsimaalaisen asua. Mutta sitten jos komennus olisi ollut johonkin umpikiinalaiseen kaupunkiin jossa olisi ollut a. likaista, b. ihmiset ei puhu lainkaan englantia ja c. suurin osa ihmisistä on kiinalaisia, niin voin sanoa että olisi ollut kyllä aika paljon haastavampaa olla töissä. Olsi ollut tiukka paikka.

*Tuleeko mieleen mitään tilanteita jotka olisi jäänyt mieleen jotenkin erityisen mieleenpainuvana tai haastavana?*

Oli pari sellaista isoa henkilöstökärhämää. Oli pari kaveria jolta hommat ei kerta kaikkiaan sujunut. Ja muun muassa pari avainhenkilöä lähti, näin kävi parikin kertaa. Sanotaan että

siellä henkilöstön kanssa oli paljon enemmän haasteita kuin Suomessa. Suomessa organisaatio on kuitenkin aika stabiileja. Ja yksi tosi iso tragedia kävi alussa, kun yksi urakoitsija kuoli. Oli ripustamassa ennen avajaisia koristetta kattoon, oli sellaisilla telineillä, ei ollut kukaan vahtimassa ja oli siis keskenään. No telineet oli huonosti tehty, ja hän tipahti ja kuoli. Siellähän sitten koko porukan kanssa käytiin sitä läpi ja muuta. Kiinalaiset on niin taikauskoisiaakin että kyllä se sellaista yleistä henkeä tappo aika pitkäksi aikaa. Että sellainen oli aika tiukka paikka, sellaista en ole ollut Suomessakaan joutunut käsittelemään, niin olihan se raskasta siellä vielä aika näkyvästi sitä käsitellä.

*No tulisiko tähän loppuun vielä mieleen jotain erityisen positiivista kokemusta?*

No sitten kun kovasti tehty töitä ja pitkiä päiviä että saatiin kaikki toimimaan ja oli sitten tehtaanavajaiset. Kaikki toimi ja kiinalainen porukka oli ylpeitä meidän tehtaasta, ja kaikki oli kiillotettu ja puunattu ja kutsuvieraita tuli paikalle punaisella matolla ja oli näyttävät avajaiset. Se oli kyllä tosi mieleenpainuva juttu, oli tosi hieno kokemus. Se oli sellainen tilaisuus mihin niin harvoin pääsee, niin se kyllä jäi mieleen. Ja sekin miten ne kiinalaiset oli niin ylpeitä että se oli heidän tehdas. Se, se oli kyllä hienoa nähdä.